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The West African Force in the reconquest of Burma, 1943-45

Osakwe, Chukwuma Confidence C., Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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THE WEST AFRICAN FORCE IN THE RECONQUEST OF BURMA, 1943-45

by

CHUKWUMA C.C. OSAKWE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
History in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

THE WEST AFRICAN FORCE IN THE RECONQUEST OF BURMA, 1943-45.

by

Chukwuma C.C. Osakwe

Adviser: Professor Patrick Abbazia

This study is a divisional history of the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions that served in the Arakan campaign during the reconquest of Burma, 1943-1945. It is not a day by day account of the two divisions operations, but rather a re-interpretation of the divisions role, successes and failures. The study begins with the origins of the divisions, their training, earlier battle experiences, and the Arakan operations. The study also discusses Japanese strategy and tactics, and concludes that in the unique Arakan terrain, they offered no innovations. Furthermore, it discusses the myth that the Japanese soldier is a master in jungle warfare.

Undoubtedly, the focus of the essay is on the African soldier. The Arakan campaign was not only an epoch making event but a testimony to the belief that to be successful in any military operation, an army has to be well trained, well led and with defined objectives. Finally, and more importantly, the success of the West African Force was as a

result of the innovating role of air supply, a by-product of air superiority. Thus, the role of air supply is discussed in direct relation with land operations. All in all, the result is a contribution and a tribute to the African soldier in the Second World War.

Preface/Acknowledgements

Burma is now called the Union of Myanmar, but one of the longest wars of the Second World War was fought there from December 1941 to September 1945. Japan in her bid to secure a South-East Asia co-prosperity sphere, an economic objective, invaded Burma in late December 1941. Allied defenses were poor and before long they were overrun. In early 1942, plans to reconquer Burma began but was not fully implemented until 1943. For the reconquest of Burma to be fully carried out the allied authorities needed trained soldiers desperately. Hence the selection of the West African Force. The following is the story of how the West African soldier contributed to the allied reconquest of Burma.

In general, writing on the West African Force is difficult because of the lack of recognition among historians and consequently the lack of literature. This is as a result of two major reasons. First, there was lack of publicity for the West African Force in Burma. Even though the Burma theater, compared with the European theater, was not as good in keeping substantial information on its units. Indeed, early in the reconquest effort an actual publicity lid, perhaps for operational reasons, was placed on them. Secondly, the nature of operations in the Arakan province of

Burma involved the breakdown of the divisions into small operating units and thus attracting little attention.

Nevertheless, some have helped ameliorate this difficult endeavor, I am grateful to Rich Boylan of the National Archives in Suitland, Maryland. My thanks go to the research assistants at the Maxwell Air Force Base Alabama who helped dig up information on the United States Army Air Force and the Royal Air Force, the two services that carried out the great supply effort that tipped the balance in the Burma campaign. I am grateful to Angela Houstoun and J. Joannou, search agents at the Public Records Office in London, who saved me a second trip to London by digging-up some much needed information. I am indebted to my supervisors, Professors' Patrick Abbazia, Alan Schulman and David Syrett for constantly guiding me. And also to the Executive Officer of the Faculty, Professor Stuart Prall, and History Program Secretary, Betty Einerman. My thanks go to all those too numerous to mention who, in one way or the other, contributed to the successful completion of this study. But above all, this dissertation is dedicated to my late father Chief Sidney B.C. Osakwe and my mother Christy E.Osakwe who raised me to always strive to succeed.

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Chapter One

The West African Force: From Origins to the Formation of the 81st and 82nd Divisions.

The 81st and 82nd West African Divisions that served in the Burma campaign from 1943 to 1945 came largely from four countries which were once occupied by the British government. The countries were; Nigeria, Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, Gambia, and Sierra Leone. Since most of the soldiers that served in the campaign were hived off from units of the Royal West African Frontier Force (R.W.A.F.F.), it can therefore, be asserted that the R.W.A.F.F. nurtured the West African Force in Burma. Thus, the origins of the R.W.A.F.F. can also be considered the beginnings of the 81st and 82nd Divisions.

The West African Frontier Force was formed in 1897 by the British Colonial government. In November of that year, the 1st battalion was also formed at Lokoja, in Nigeria. At Ibadan in March 1898 the second battalion was formed.¹ On its formation in 1897, Lord (Frederick D.) Lugard was made the commandant of the force. The history of Lugard in the service of the Imperial Army goes back to India where he was born in 1858. At age twenty, he was commissioned in the East Norfolk Regiment and served in the then Burma campaigns for ten years. But perhaps his most significant experience, which

got him the job as commandant of the West African Force was his services for the Royal Niger Company based in Nigeria in 1894 where he served under George Goldie. But at the time of his appointment, he was in the employ of a South African Company.²

The formation of the R.W.A.F.F. was a direct result of the Anglo-French rivalry over territories in West Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century.³ After the Berlin West African Conference of 1884-85 lent order to the European scramble for territories, France and Britain were the dominant powers in West Africa jockeying for territories. The conference resolutions stipulated that occupation of territories must be effective to be valid. Lord Salisbury, the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, while denying the French territories in the Nile valley, was ready to concede territories in West Africa. As a result, in the Anglo-French agreement of 1890, the hinterland of Algeria was allowed to extend to the Say-Barruwa line. By other agreements, Sierra Leone and Gambia lost some of their hinterland to the French. The areas not occupied were the northern parts of Nigeria and the Gold Coast.⁴

In 1896, the French Foreign Minister, Gabriel Hanotaux, began a policy of "active occupation", he occupied a stretch of the Niger from Ilo to Bussa in Borgu. This alarmed the

British, whose most prized piece of territory in West Africa lay in that region.⁵ Perhaps the French occupation of these areas might have been settled without serious tension, if not for the appointment of Joseph Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary in the Salisbury government. Unlike Salisbury, whose brand of imperialism meant occupying the Nile region so as to protect the British Indian Empire, Chamberlain's policy was total imperialism, no matter where. But Chamberlain's policy needs to be seen in its proper military perspective.

In West Africa, militarily, the French were superior. The French Colonial policy of assimilation helped to make available more men for military duties. The French spent more money on its military than the British. During the period under review, France maintained troops in Senegal, Algeria, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Sudan. There they had about three thousand four hundred regular troops who came from the warlike ethnic groups in the Futa Jalon and Kaarta regions, deemed to have very good combatants.⁶

In British West Africa, the situation was different. Some of the Constabulary forces available were maintained by the trading companies and could not be used without prior approval by the board of directors.⁷ Some of the constabulary forces were the Glover Hausas, the Royal Niger Company Constabulary Force, the Gold Coast Constabulary Force,

the Niger Coast Constabulary Force, also known as the Oil Rivers Irregulars and locally nicknamed the "forty thieves", and the Sierra Leone Frontier Police. Moreover, the West Indian Regiment stationed in West Africa was an imperial force and could not be used by the colonial government without the approval of the War Office. Furthermore, due to the British government's weaker emphasis on West African territories and the lack of organized opposition by West Africans under occupation, these forces were poorly trained and poorly equipped.⁸

All in all, considering the constraints, Chamberlain decided to re-organize the forces available and also to form new units. This reorganization culminated in the formation of the West African Force in 1897. On its formation the force was called the West African Force. But in 1898 it was called the West African Frontier Force.⁹ The title of Royal West African Frontier Force was given by King George V in 1921.¹⁰ The force of two battalions, consisting of over two thousand men, essentially an infantry force. Its artillery consisted of two 4.7 pounder R.M.L. batteries and one reserve battery with six 75mm guns. However, in 1898 an engineer unit of twenty Madras was formed. Furthermore, telegraph, transport, medical and accounting sections and a mounted infantry unit of three hundred men and one hundred horses were also added.¹¹

But the force was not solely a "child of circumstance" formed as a result of the Anglo-French rivalry.¹² It was a force that would have inevitably been formed even without the Anglo-French rivalry. The ending of the slave trade at the turn of the 19th century gave impetus for the establishment of a new type of economic relationship between the imperial power and the colonized peoples. Unlike previously, this new type of relationship, which was essentially the exploitation of the occupied territories' raw materials, meant going into the interior. The drive to the interior met with stiff resistance because the economic and political independence of the indigenous people were threatened. And by using only the many and variegated constabulary forces, such resistance could not be effectively defeated. As a result there was need for a consolidation of forces. Indeed, during the period under review, the British trading companies administering pieces of territories in this region were gradually giving way to a central government which would obviously need its own force to meet local resistance. The British governments' takeover of territories from trading companies was for the most part because of Chamberlains' brand of imperialism. Nevertheless, the consolidation of forces predominantly of West Africans would further clarify the British administrative policy of indirect rule -using the resources of an occupied territory to run the affairs of that region.¹³

Finally, the British military were overstretched in Africa. The reconquest of Sudan began in 1896; Sudanese troops had mutinied in Uganda and the Ugandan war was in the offing; the Sierra Leone Hut Tax riots broke out in 1898 and the tensions leading to the Boer War were obvious.¹⁴ The British were desperate for more soldiers. But there was a serious problem.

The British soldier in West Africa were very expensive to maintain, and not too many were enthusiastic about service in West Africa. West Africa was still considered the "White Mans Grave." But J. Bell a surgeon to the forces, has maintained this factor was mostly psychological. He pointed out that

"the minds of the men in this country have a powerful influence in the cases of remittent fever they cared not whether they lived or died; consequently the mind became depressed, sickness ensued and death resulted from no other cause than mental influence."¹⁵

The West Indian regiment that was stationed in West Africa at the start of the 19th century was considered fit only for garrison duties and not for bush warfare. Moreover, it was too expensive to maintain and to allow recruitment of many troops to meet the expanding British interests in West Africa. All these considerations, made it logical to raise a force comprised mainly of West Africans and officered by the British. Also, it was believed, the soldiers would more easily adapt to bush warfare than foreign or European soldiers. Thus, while the French activities in West Africa led directly to the formation of the West African force, the

formation of a force like the W.A.F.F. was necessary for many reasons. Indeed, a Colonial Office document makes clear that

" the question of the responsibility of the Imperial Government in connection with the Niger territory and when the necessity for the relinquishment by the Royal Niger Company of the administration of those territories became apparent, it became necessary to form the nucleus of a new military force for Imperial purposes on the Niger ... this was chosen as a convenient moment to consider as a whole the position of the military forces of the Crown under the control of the Colonial Office throughout West Africa to make their forces mutually self-supporting ... it was considered necessary the various constabularies and the newly raised West African Frontier Force should be amalgamated into one organization and bear a military name."16

As a result, by 1902, all the constabularies had been integrated into the W.A.F.F. This integration made the W.A.F.F. look thus: one Gambia Company of about one hundred and twenty men; two Gold Coast battalions one of which was one thousand six hundred strong and another about five hundred men; two Nigerian Regiments of not less than three thousand men each; one Sierra Leone battalion whose total number would not be over one thousand.

From its inception, the force was a concern of the colonial government. But the formation of the units was supervised by the War Office, which offered technical advice. Financing and other matters relating to the raising of such units were handled by the various Colonial governments which had their headquarters in London at the office of the Colonial Secretary.

From its formation and amalgamation with the constabulary force until the First World War began in 1914, the W.A.F.F. was organizing, consolidating, recruiting, training and equipping to become a better force. Its operations during this period were mainly in suppressing resistance to British Imperial Administration. Some of the officers were from the militia and had inadequate training, but commanding officers were from the regular Army. All officers were European. They were armed initially with old carbines. But in time the M.L.E. 303 magazine rifle was introduced. Artillery seven pounder guns were considered useless and were consequently replaced with 2.95 inch mountain guns. The Mounted Infantry was first armed with the Lee-Metford carbine, Martini action, and carried in a bucket. The short Martini-Lee-Enfield with bayonet was introduced around 1909. Finally, a matchet was carried and at least one-third of the troops had six feet eight-inch spears.¹⁷

Tactics was also evolving at this time. Warfare in open country was rare. The favored tactic was to advance in square formations. Most of the open country operations was carried on during the day. Night time operations were avoided because of lack of intelligence stemming mainly from the untrustworthiness of the natives. Bush warfare was frequent. Initially the tactic was to have an advance guard followed by a column in a single file along a bush path. When opposition

was encountered, the seven pounder guns and maxims would open fire at the source of the greatest volume of fire. But because of supply problems and outflanking movements by the enemy, scouts began to be deployed along the bush path. Columns were not confined to bush paths and they were broken up to be self supporting. The soldiers were paired and trees were used for target and stockade location.¹⁸ The outcome of most of these operations were obvious -the possessor of the greatest firepower, usually the European forces, would win.

It has been mentioned that the W.A.F.F. was used as an instrument for expansion in the hey day of Anglo-French rivalry for territories in West Africa. It was further used in the suppression of internal opposition to the British administration. West Africans did not particularly warm up to the force because it was seen as a symbol of British occupation. This might also explain to some extent their hatred for organized military institutions. The force was able to attract and maintain recruits only because of the remuneration. But the force had some merits.

In the first World War, 1914 - 1918, the force was employed in dislodging the Germans in Togo and Cameroon. They did well and were sent to East Africa. For Togoland operations which were carried out with French forces, the W.A.F.F. had three machine guns and about one thousand and fifty rank and file,

essentially infantry. The French forces were about six hundred and sixty strong, rank and file. The German forces were about one thousand five hundred strong, rank and file. The Cameroon operation contingent was much bigger. For the total operations, including reinforcements, it comprised eight hundred and sixty-four European officers, five thousand nine hundred and twenty-seven Africans and about twenty thousand carriers. The German troops was composed of about six thousand Africans and five hundred Europeans.²⁰ In the East African campaign, there was also an Anglo-French force contribution. The British forces which were larger, were around nine infantry companies of about one hundred and twenty men each, a complement of carriers (about three hundred and eighty-one men), one battery of 2.95 guns, about twelve machine guns, four officers of the Royal Medical Corps and one storeman.²¹ The impact of the first World War on the W.A.F.F. can at best be described as psychological. It helped de-mystify the myth of the white man. This helped season the cadre corps of the force for its later combat role. But this impact was punctured by about two decades of peace before the Second World War and their role in peace time - suppressing all forms of resistance to British administration. Moreover, the small size of the force- about five thousand on the average- was too small a cadre to make any major impact in the whole of West Africa. In any event, about thirty thousand troops were raised in World War 1.²²

It is important to point out that the policy of using the force outside West Africa was not unusual. It was in keeping with the recommendations of Lord Haliburton's committee that sat in the 1870's. They had enunciated, among other things, the principle that troops from one colony might be used for defence services in a neighboring colony.²³

From inception till the end of the second World War, the major problem of the R.W.A.F.F. was in the recruitment of suitable personnel. For the British commissioned officers, West Africa was still considered the "White mans' grave," an unattractive posting. To overcome this, efforts were made to provide the available officers with all modern day amenities necessary for comfortable living.²⁴ For the West African recruits, recruitment was "voluntary." The ideal scenario usually was: a political officer - most had military training - accompanied by a small body of soldiers and a doctor would make a tour of the villages. In every village after due regal ceremonies to the traditional ruler, the villagers were assembled, the Union Jack hoisted and a recruiting speech made by the political officer. All volunteers who passed the medical test were sent by lorry to a recruiting centre.²⁵ While recruiting style might vary from town to town or village to village or even country to country, the policy of recruiting through the medium of traditional rulers was the same. But because some of these traditional rulers were not

legitimate representatives of their people, the idea of voluntary recruitment is questionable. In fact, the colonial political officers usually sent out coercive instructions to the traditional rulers to produce a certain number of soldiers.²⁶ The scenario of assembled villagers allowed the political officer to choose the appropriate quota for the particular village. In Nigeria, for instance, recruitment was smoother in Northern Nigeria because of the socio-political structure created by the emirate system. Thus, there, recruitment, it can be argued, was voluntary. But in Southern Nigeria it does not appear so because most of the rulers were colonial appointees and they did not command the full support of the people they ruled. Their subjects were forced to accept them because they had the backing of the colonial governments which often meant military backing. On how some of the "warrant chiefs," as they were called, got their mantle of leadership, an authority points out that many schemed for appointment. "Some of these came from the senior lineages of their village groups who now started feeling that it was their birth right to their unit. Some were simply ambitious, go ahead men who wanted to exploit every opportunity to line their pockets."²⁷ Since the chiefs were seen as lackeys of the British administration, the idea of town meetings were subtle set-ups for conscription. As a result, therefore, recruitment to all intents and purposes was not voluntary in these parts of Southern Nigeria.

During the 1920's and 30's, in peacetime soldiering, training of the R.W.A.F.F. for combat included training for both bush warfare and warfare in open country. Scholars writing later on the war in Burma have insinuated that since the West African soldier came from a region consisting of predominantly rain forest, the soldiers needed no special training in bush or jungle warfare. But while bush warfare might appear simple, it has been argued that "it is a war in a peculiar country, which demands the common-sense application of suitable methods to the circumstances and conditions." Furthermore, "untrained troops are simply a menace off the roads."²⁸ Indeed, "the finest jungle fighter is he with the clearest head, the finest of senses and the broadest education and experience."²⁹

During the inter-war years the R.W.A.F.F. in Nigeria consisted of four battalions. Each consisted of four rifle companies and a machine gun section. The Gold Coast Regiment had a headquarters, one infantry battalion organized in four companies and a battery. Gambia maintained her one company. Sierra Leone comprised a headquarters, a signal section and two companies. Individual and weapons training was carried out during the rainy season while the dry season saw collective - platoon and Company level - training. In training, long drills and parades, important aspects of producing disciplined soldiers, were emphasized. The West

African soldier especially liked drills and parades.³⁰ Training in arms and technical specialties were also undertaken. With their arms, they were good enough to win some competitions. From 1923-1937, they won the African cup twelve times (Army Rifle Association Decentralized Matches); they also won the African Machine Gun match four times.³¹ In technical fields, some soldiers were sent to the United Kingdom to learn various skills and come back to teach. Specialty training schools were later established at Teshie in the Gold Coast, Enugu, Kaduna in Nigeria and within other locales.³² In all, training of the soldiers ranged from individual discipline, knowledge of arms and then collective training. It is necessary to point out, also, that the British West African soldiers were considered better than their French counterparts because the French tried to teach tactics from recruitment and thus did not attain the same standard of discipline or military training in their units as the R.W.A.F.F.³³

The major problem while in training was language because most of the European officers were not literate in the major West African languages. The problem was tackled by the authorities by making English the only language for instruction. It appeared easier when compared with the system in East Africa. In East Africa, English, Swahili and Chinyanja were recognized as official languages. It was

further made complex by the policy in East Africa which made it mandatory for the European officers to pass a simple test in one of the two recognized languages on appointment or within six months of appointment to the Kings African Rifles (K.A.R) - the East African equivalent of the R.W.A.A.F. The East African soldier was allowed to speak his traditional language and one other official language.³⁴ In West Africa, however, the authorities made English the only language because it was easier to teach one than many languages to the soldiers. They believed that English could be learned quicker and easier because West Africans had a long relationship with English speaking Europeans from the time of the Christian missions. But the impact of Christianity did not gain the same degree of foothold in all regions or countries of West Africa. To execute this policy, they engaged African school masters on a scale of eight per battalion to teach English to the soldiers.³⁵ In peace time, the practice of engaging African school masters might work, but in war, with a quick turnover of recruits, it was doubtful if it could work. In fact, during the Second World War, the lacunae in this policy was realized and amendments were made. Without dropping the teaching of English, the soldiers were encouraged to learn other languages, especially Hausa. Colloquial Hausa was considered essential for the British officers and non-commissioned officers.³⁶

A significant event happened in the life of the W.A.F.F. in 1936, the appointment of Major General George J. Giffard as the Inspector General of the R.W.A.F.F. and the Kings African Rifles. As Inspector General, he made for smoother liaison between the Colonial Office, the colonial governments and the War Office. He took keen interest in organizing, equipping and training the African force for modern war.

Giffard had a long association with West Africa. Only a little over fifty years of age, he saw combat in East Africa and France in World War 1, was wounded and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order. He also received French and Portuguese decorations.³⁷ He was a good military administrator. Commenting on Giffard later on the war in Burma, Lieutenant General William Slim observed that he had good manners, was unselfish and "understood the fundamentals of war - that soldiers must be trained before they can fight, fed before they can march and relieved before they are worn out."³⁸ General Giffard was later to command the Eleventh Army Group in Burma.

But as Inspector General of the African Colonial Forces, he was involved in the tasks of planning, organization, equipment and expansion of the forces. These tasks were further examined, coordinated and approved by the Committee of Imperial Defence acting through its overseas

Defence Committee on which the Admiralty, the War Office, the Air Ministry, the Colonial Office and other ministries were represented.³⁹

Events leading to the second World War had begun when Giffard was appointed Inspector General. The W.A.F.F. expansion in the event of any contingency was continuing. In the event of hostilities in East Africa, "...Nigeria and Gold Coast were required to provide a brigade group for the expeditionary force, each consisting of a Headquarters and Signal section, three light batteries, field Company and a Field Ambulance. The Sierra Leone battalion and Gambia Company were to be retained for local defence. The Vickers machine guns were withdrawn from battalions and replaced by four three inch mortars."⁴⁰ The expansion of the W.A.F.F. was not completed when the second World War began. But in December of 1938, two hundred transport drivers from Nigeria and one hundred from the Gold Coast were to be added to the planned expeditionary force.

The role allotted to West Africa at the start of the Second World War was to mobilize her mineral and agricultural resources and maintain strict control over her exports.⁴¹ The British authorities did not plan for any contingency that West Africa might be a theater of combat or that her troops would be used overseas. Initially, as a result, the W.A.F.F.

role in the war was undefined. Indeed, the role of West Africa as the source of agricultural and mineral resources might have actually prevented recruitment of enough manpower for the force, because able-bodied men were siphoned off to farms and mines. Moreover, the prospect of arming large numbers of West Africans was still anathema. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Chamberlain had instructed that British Africans, whether black or white, be treated the same as British soldiers.⁴²

The appointment of General Giffard in 1936 as the Inspector General of the R.W.A.F.F., and the increased financial support from the colonies - one million pounds Sterling grant- was not enough to try to re-organize and modernize the R.W.A.F.F. Or perhaps the modernization effort lacked luster until war came to North Africa, and Italy invaded East Africa. Whatever it was, however, a headquarters in West Africa was formed in July 1940 under Lt.Gen. Giffard at Achimota College near Accra, Gold Coast, to co-ordinate the defence of British West Africa. Caught in the middle with little defence infrastructure in place and a relatively small number of soldiers to defend the large expanse of West Africa under British administration, Giffard sought to build coast defences and to recruit and train more soldiers.

The organization and establishment of a standard battalion

and a battery on the eve of the second World War comprised of a headquarters, headquarters company, intercommunication platoon (runners), mortar platoon (armed with four 3.7 inch howitzers), anti-aircraft platoon (armed with four L.M.G's, administration platoon and four rifle companies each with headquarters. Each of the rifle companies had four platoons which in turn had three sections. Each platoon was armed with two L.M.G's. Each rifle company had at least two anti-tank rifles, sixteen discharger cups and ninety-six grenades. In all, the total strength of a battalion was about nine hundred men-eighty Europeans, five hundred and ninety one Africans, and about two hundred and nineteen gun carriers.⁴³

In all this, the major problem was the lack of commissioned officers. The British officers sent earlier by the War Office served as the core of the W.A.F.F. officers. Some political officers-mostly retired military men -serving in West Africa and other European expatriates with military training volunteered and joined the W.A.F.F. officer corps. But they were not enough. Thus, the recruitment of commissioned officers was intensified. Unlike East Africa, where more Europeans settled, West Africa could not produce enough Europeans to form an officer corps. To compound the problem, Britain was already fighting for survival in the Battle of Britain, and the campaigns in North Africa had

begun. But above all, to 'save British manpower', officers were recruited from Southern Rhodesia and Poland.⁴⁴ The plan to employ Poles in West Africa was made after consultations with the Governors of the West African colonies and the Secretary of State for the colonies. The secrecy involved in these consultations, perhaps, was for two reasons. First, because it might ignite strong opposition from West Africans who were on the throes of a new phase of nationalism- the struggle for independence. They would argue that it would be better to train Africans than have non -British officers commanding units of the West African force. Secondly, to stave off German propaganda that Britain was not only using Africans but also Poles to save the British Empire.

Nevertheless, the Polish soldiers who were willing to serve with the West African force were signed to contracts in September 1941 and consequently given British commissions. In 1943, the officers were given the option of remaining with the British army on conclusion of their contract or transferring to the Polish forces. As a result, one hundred and fifty decided to transfer to the Polish forces, of which one hundred and ten went to the United Kingdom and forty elsewhere. The remaining seventy-one stayed on, with the majority serving with the West African force. About twenty-three directly served in the 81st Division and about twelve with the 82nd Division.⁴⁵ In all, approximately four

hundred Polish officers were needed, two hundred and sixty-eight volunteered, and about two hundred actually served in West Africa.⁴⁶ The Polish officers were used in the medical, artillery, infantry, signals and the engineering corps. The age bracket of officers requested by Giffard, the GOC in West Africa, was from thirty-two to thirty-five. But it was extended, on the insistence of the Polish representative, to forty-five so that no one age bracket would be unduly tapped.⁴⁷ Throughout their service with the West African force, the main problems encountered were the lack of knowledge of the English language and lack of general experience. Efforts were made by the GOC West Africa to carefully select the officers who had basic knowledge of English and refuse those who were earlier found unsuitable for employment with African troops. The unsuitable ones either lacked experience or were insensitive to African psychology and culture. Some of these Poles were consequently sent to the Middle East.⁴⁸

The recruitment of West African soldiers which was an ongoing process from the inception of the W.A.F.F., was smoother than in the past because of the West African nationalists' total support for the war.⁴⁹ The nationalists, the mouthpiece for the majority of West Africans, wanted to see West Africa defended. But above all, they were looking forward to the rewards that would come from supporting the

war, as promised by the Atlantic Charter. Full independence was enticing. Nonetheless, the recruitment of West Africans was selective. Different regions were specially favored for different units of the army. In Nigeria for instance, recruitment for technical units came from the southern half, while the northern half was a source of unskilled manpower.⁵⁰

In West Africa, as elsewhere, the War Office which was responsible for among other things, producing the officer cadre for the West African force, was not able to obtain enough Europeans. Africanization was thus quickened to augment the British, Southern Rhodesia (South Africa) and Polish officer corps. In the W.A.F.F., initially, the technical units had a high proportion of Europeans. In an infantry battalion, however, the approximate percentage was 10% whereas in the newly raised anti-aircraft units it was as high as 40%. However, as Africans were trained it was progressively reduced. For instance, by the end of 1942, the anti-aircraft units had fallen from 40% to about 18% and in 1943 to about 10% or less.⁵¹

Italy entered the Second World War on June 10, 1940 and invaded the British East African colonies. At the end of June 1940, two West African brigades were sent to re-inforce the East African colonial force. The 23rd Nigerian Brigade and the 24th Gold Coast Brigade were essentially infantry

brigades and consisted of three infantry battalions, a brigade headquarters, a signal section, a light battery of four 3.7 howitzers, one field company and one field ambulance company. In East Africa they were part of two divisions. The 11th African Division consisted of the 23rd Nigerian Brigade, with 1st, 2nd and 3rd Nigerian Regiments, and the 21st East African Brigade. The 12th African Division had the 22nd East African Brigade and the 24th Gold Coast Brigade. It is important to point out that in East Africa, the West African Expeditionary force saw combat alongside South African troops with air support from the South African Air Force.⁵²

The 23rd Nigerian Brigade with no experience in mobile warfare and hindered by a long familiarity with bush warfare and the constraints of carrying headloads was spectacular in its advance from Mogadishu to Harrar. The brigade's advance to Harrar, a distance of about six hundred miles, was along the 'Strada Imperial' averaging sixty-five miles per day. The rapidity of the move necessitated the relocation of the base of operations by the South African Air Force in February and March 1941.⁵³ The West African Force, reminiscent of Adowa and Isandlwana defeated the Italians at the formidable Marda Pass, at Babile and at Bisidimo. They also took part in operations to capture Diredawa. At one time in the course of the campaign, one mortar section of the 23rd Brigade captured

a complete Italian battalion.⁵⁴ On the whole, they captured thirteen guns and one thousand one hundred prisoners. The speed of advance of the Nigerian brigade was not solely because of their expertise but also because of low morale of the Italian forces. However, the Italians tended to give battle in areas geographically suited for defence, for instance, the Marda Pass. Marda Pass was a formidable proposition, towering above the Jijjiga plains. It was an important plain because of the strong garrison which held the Pass and the aerodrome which was in full view from the plain. The Gold Coast Brigade took part in the Wadara campaign.

In all, long associated with bush warfare, they had now fought in open warfare against an European army and excelled. It was no longer a force armed with 'maxims and six pounders,' detailed for police functions in the colonies. It was now participating in a modern war in a modern age. The two West African brigades came back to their various stations between August and November 1941, but this time to meet a changed situation in West Africa.

The importance of the East African campaign to the W.A.F.F. and for their later experience in Burma is simple. It formally introduced them to modern war. It was not a war or campaign fought with maxims and six pounders against sometimes defenseless civilians but a war fought with armored

cars and sophisticated weaponry. Feelings of inferiority to the European race in warfare as a result of modern technological backwardness were now debunked. All these and the inoculation in combat made this cadre a formidable group in the later campaigns in Burma.

After the East African campaign, by the end of 1942 with the Second World War widening in scope, an African Colonial Force was planned which would include the W.A.F.F., the K.A.R. and other British colonial forces in Africa.⁵⁵ The role of the force was not clear. But for any contingency the process of modernization of the W.A.F.F. included the addition of some specialized units that were to be of great significance later in the war in Burma. Early in 1941 an auxiliary group had been added to each brigade. They were now increased to consist of a headquarters and three companies each of five hundred carriers. Each group had a small European cadre and could carry up to thirty-six tons of supplies and ammunition up to fifteen miles a day.⁵⁶ Furthermore, reconnaissance squadrons were added to each brigade.

Barely had the two brigades departed from West Africa than France fell and altered the whole strategic situation in West Africa. The fall of France and the establishment of the Vichy government including French African colonial territories made

such territories a serious threat to the British occupied territories in West Africa and in general the overall allied plans in Africa.⁵⁷ But particularly for the British government it was a crucial situation. France had a large number of troops in her colonies and all four British West African territories were within striking distance. The British West African territories were hard to defend because, among other things, they had long coastlines. Sierra Leone's coastline was about two hundred miles, Gold Coast three hundred and thirty miles and Nigeria about six hundred miles.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Lagos port, the major port of Nigeria and the main source of export of raw materials, was only a few miles from a French colony, Dahomey, now Benin Republic. The port in Freetown, Sierra Leone, was the main revictualling station for convoys headed for the Middle East, India, and South America.⁵⁹ But the situation could not be better. With Japan occupying Britain's Far East portion of her Empire, West Africa now held an important place on the sea route to the Middle and Far East.

The problem properly assessed, the British had two options. First, try to use a protege to destabilize the Vichy government in Africa. Secondly, plan for and execute an offensive -defence against the Vichy government controlling African territories. They adopted both courses. They also sought to reduce the French threat at sea by destroying the

French fleet at Mers-El-Kebir, the battle ship Richelieu in the port of Dakar, and by blockading Dakar.

The British sought to destabilize the Vichy government through Operation Susan, "an invasion of French Morocco, the overthrow of the regime there, and the establishment of a French government friendly to Great Britain."⁶⁰ A further attempt was to install General Charles De Gaulle, the leader of the Free French Forces in Dakar, Senegal. This expedition, code named Operation Menace was carried out from 4th August 1940 to 29th September 1940. It was only a menace to the British. It failed because political requirements were subordinated to military plans, intelligence was poor, the belief that the ships could neutralize the French forts, and too much obvious 'wishful thinking', plus the hurried organization of the expedition complicated by the fact that stores and units available had been allocated and in some cases embarked for a totally different operation.⁶¹ Above all, de Gaulle was a relatively unknown figure compared with Marshal Henri Petain, the hero of Verdun, and the blockade of Dakar and the consequent deprivations helped swell propaganda against operation Menace. The second option, the defence of West Africa against a Vichy controlled attack, never got out of its planning stage. An uneasy peace remained in West Africa even after the formation of the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions.

But the whole situation was also good for general staff planning, coordination and training in a real war situation. No doubt the memories remained in the deep recesses of commanders and soldiers alike and would have helped them to adjust in Burma where they were to employ them.

The formation of the two West African divisions was a matter of expediency, the direct result of the Second World War. From inception they were designed to be an expeditionary force.

On January 1, 1943 General Headquarters West Africa received instructions from the War Office to form a division to be employed overseas.⁶² This order was based on the assessment that ten battalions were sufficient to garrison West Africa. A Belgian Brigade Group, then stationed in West Africa, and other units of the West African Force would then be available for service overseas. Giffard decided that the first division, later to become the 81st West African Division, would consist of the 3rd, 5th, and 6th infantry brigade groups and that they were to be concentrated in Nigeria and the Gold Coast for training.⁶³ A fortnight later, a second order came for the formation of the second division, later to become the 82nd West African Division. The circumstances of the establishment of the divisions is not clear. The British needed soldiers to save her tottering

empire. But why from West Africa?

The earlier contention was that Giffard, on a visit to the War Office in London in December of 1942, suggested the use of West African troops in Burma. But General Wavell, trying desperately to defend the British Far East Empire, had requested from the Commander of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S.) around the end of November "to consider sending me some African troops for Ceylon or Burma, now that Gondar had fallen and the campaign against Italian East Africa was over; he replied on the 16th of December that two brigades could be made available, the first of which could be ready to embark at the end of January."⁶⁴ The likely scenario, therefore, was that Wavell asked for the West African soldiers, the War Office approved, and Giffard went on with the formation of the divisions. But the availability of a division by January appeared unrealistic.

In any event, the idea of using West African troops overseas was possible because the threat from the Vichy government was not as serious as before. The allied forces had launched Operation Torch - the invasion of North Africa.⁶⁵ Secondly, recruitment had increased so much that it was possible to leave ten battalions to garrison West Africa and still provide overseas units. It was now realized that any attack on West Africa would be limited to submarine

attacks on ports and other installations. The GOC West Africa concluded that "no attack by land forces, surface craft or air forces is considered possible in the foreseeable future."⁶⁶ Also, the West African nationalists were supportive of the British government on the war effort, unlike India which chose this period to intensify its struggle for independence.

The 81st Division officially came into existence on March 1, 1943, and the 82nd on August 1, 1943.⁶⁷ Since the 81st Division was to be sent out first, all shortages in equipment and personnel were to be supplemented from troops of the 82nd Division already forming. Carriers were taken instead of armored cars because of their envisaged role in Burma. Polish officers were taken only if they had been contracted for a tour of duty. But before the 81st Division embarked for Burma, they were stationed in Nigeria around Oloko-Meji, Ibadan, Abeokuta and elsewhere to be retrained in jungle warfare. All these areas were thickly forested. To bring the 81st Division to war strength, and because it was the first division to leave for Burma, some trained soldiers, especially officers, were hived off the 82nd Division, as recruitment for the two divisions continued.

The new recruits were given two months preliminary training without arms. Training included all forms of physical

education and drills. They, further, had two months training in the recruitment company. At this stage their training included elementary rifle and automatic weapons training, drills and route marches. Afterwards, there were another two months training in the training company for all recruits, less signallers and motor transport drivers. A further musketry course was undertaken. Battle drill and all forms of fieldcraft were part of the syllabus. The motor transport syllabus called for three months training, and signallers were trained for six months. All Europeans were considered under training on arrival in West Africa.⁶⁸

The location of the various units of the 81st Division in areas of thick vegetation was because the rain forests of West Africa, especially Southern Nigeria, were similar to the jungles in the Far East. On marksmanship, they were taught the importance of good fire control, direction and the use of the ear rather than the eye in jungle war. The efficacy of the offensive as opposed to the defensive was emphasized. But for the consolidation of gains or for defense, "defending a line" or "holding a position" might be employed.

Strict fire discipline and steady nerves were important. In jungle warfare night operations were not usually undertaken except to get to the enemy beyond some open ground which could be crossed in daylight on account of fire. Darkness

could be used to cover movement. The need for limited objectives was emphasized, due to lack of free movement in the jungle. Ambush patrols would be important, also. Ambush patrols were advised to protect flanks when units were road bound. Indeed, the Japanese soldier was adept at using his patrols to pin down the enemy and consequently go on to outflank them. Thus the enemy soldier could be stopped by fire alone. Under the cover of the jungle, the soldiers were taught to place themselves at points where with surprise and maneuver they might be able to get the enemy in point blank range and use the bayonet, grenade and automatic weapons to assault. To carry on the offensive, the fighting must be done on foot, not from rifle pits. Slit trenches could be dug for protection from bombing and shell fire. Since the Japanese had not shown any alternative line of communication like air or sea, her land line of communication appeared her most important. As a result, the training plan was to outflank and isolate the enemys' strong positions so that, he would run out of supplies. No army can fight without supplies. But even if his position could not be outflanked, it must be assaulted in two waves. The first wave would go straight to a limited objective. The second wave, would be made up of large parties and would go on a methodical mopping up of concealed positions.

In some jungle terrain the high ground is not necessarily a

vantage position because no more can be seen from it than from low ground. The high ground as a matter of fact creates a good target for snipers. Lines of communication are the important points to control. Thus, roads, track junctions, river crossings, bridges, ferries, fords, etc., are highly important. In jungle warfare supporting fire is difficult to organize. But grenades and automatic weapons fire could be used as substitutes. Snipers can be used to gain moral ascendancy over the enemy. A capable and well organized junior officer cadre was emphasized because they are needed for making quick decisions that can make or break a plan in jungle terrain where communication with the rear was sometimes difficult. Finally, for good security, ambushes were essential.⁶⁹ Engineers to be used in Burma, it was stipulated, must be trained first as jungle fighters before they could properly execute their role as engineers.⁷⁰ Cooperation with other arms stressed artillery support. The 81st Division training in air cooperation was dismal. There was no conception of air support. In all, their training memorandum discussed only the ability to mark spots for aircraft, and on the role of the air arm as a source of aerial photographs.⁷¹

During battle drills, however, emphasis was laid on the need to have the initiative at all times. All forms of attack, including infiltration, mopping up, flank protection,

encircling and filleting tactics, including the use of 3 inch mortars and the light battery, were practised. But most importantly, patrols on which the commander was dependent for accurate information were critical. Patrols were given clear orders and trained in jungle movement. They had to be accurate. As a result their tasks were to be limited. A patrol was not considered complete until either the main body reported back or was heavily engaged. There were two types of patrols, the fighting and the recce patrols. They essentially did the same function but were distinguished mainly by the strength and weapons used and on the terrain on which they operated. The fighting patrol was designed to gain information as to the location and the strength of the enemy. This was done by capturing prisoners or to harass the enemy by limited offensive action. The strength of the patrol depended on the task allotted to it. Recce patrols usually went out to gain detailed information on enemy strength and dispositions. This type of patrol was usually carried out by infantry or even light armored units. The training of patrols entailed various jungle skills like tree climbing, silence, the freezing game, memorizing routes, direction tests and quick reaction.⁷²

In the 82nd Division, jungle training was emphasized. Comprised of 1st, 2nd and 4th Brigade Groups, the division had for the most part raw recruits, having lost most of their

trained manpower to the 81st Division. Their training was intense and was divided into two phases. Phase one was training in 'normal' warfare. The emphasis was on weapons training, physical training, English language training, battle drills, fieldcraft and assault courses, all of which took place in open camps. Training was total, officers and men, and it included training in administrative duties like organization and documentation.

Training in jungle warfare was part of the second phase of training. During this phase discipline, health, and sanitation were not ignored. Psychological preparation for war - assault courses, night training, endurance marches, swamp training were all part of this phase. The divisional commander, Maj. Gen. Mcl. Bruce emphasized the delegation of greater responsibility to African non-commissioned officers because the British officers were often the Japanese soldier's main target.⁷³ Apart from the disadvantageous loss of her trained manpower to the 81st Division, the 82nd had the advantage of structuring the training of the division to reflect the shortcomings of the 81st.

Finally, the bulk of the West African force began to leave for the Burma theater in July of 1943. In the course of the war, the movement continued as reinforcements and casualties went back and forth.⁷⁴ The total number of troops that went

to Burma was estimated to be about one hundred thousand.⁷⁵ But it appears to be far too high. A standard infantry division was about ten thousand soldiers. But for the 81st and 82nd it was different because of the large support units like carriers that were added before embarkation to Burma. It can safely be assumed that the two divisions were each made up of approximately twelve thousand to fifteen thousand soldiers. Thus with reinforcements in the course of the war, the number could double to a total of forty-eight thousand to sixty thousand. In all, therefore, the original estimate of one hundred thousand, perhaps, might be for the total number of soldiers raised in the four West African territories for garrison duties and the Burma campaign.

For the West African force the expedition to Burma was an epoch event. It was the first time such a force, in such a number, from West Africa had been sent to fight on a foreign continent and in an independent role. The question, therefore, is why was the force needed in Burma? The British Empire was far flung and overstretched. India was the biggest colony and the main reservoir for manpower, but it, too, was overstretched. As Lt. Gen. Wilfrid Lindsell points out "... by the end of 1941, India had in numbers including administrative troops, an equivalent of fifteen divisions serving overseas."⁷⁶ These troops, over 2.5 million men, were

largely maintained from India.⁷⁷ But the situation in India was not conducive for further recruitment. India was restive. As a result, a lot of troops had already been detailed for internal security purposes. India was no longer a viable source of additional troops.

There was also the possibility of using West Indian troops who had been used earlier in the century for garrison duty in West Africa. Indeed, one of the reasons advanced then for their being used in West Africa was that they were likely to have a natural resistance to malaria. This was a very important consideration because Burma was in a malaria zone. But it was thought they were only useful for garrison duty. Otherwise, they were over-fed, lazy and not good at bush warfare.⁷⁸ Whether this characterization of the West Indian soldier was based on prejudice or military professionalism is not clear. Whatever else, circumstances and requirements narrowed the British options to Africans, East and West.

The West African force was needed in Burma because the Burma theater was grossly undermanned and the authorities were desperate for soldiers. The West African troops had a better natural resistance to malaria, although a prophylactic had long since been developed to fight malaria. The West African soldier, it was thought, would be quicker to adjust to fighting in the dense jungles of Burma, having come from

a region of tropical rain forest which in some ways are similar but not exactly the same. And the need for trained soldiers was very important because the situation in Burma was getting desperate. Training of recruits in jungle warfare was not easy and moreover would take a considerable amount of time.⁷⁹ Indeed, the complexity of training soldiers in bush or jungle warfare might have been a reason for India not having enough jungle fighters. Although the main threat to peace there was on their mountainous North-West frontier, where they often prepared for war.⁸⁰

It was only after the fall of Burma that the syllabus at the Indian Tactical school was revised to include training in jungle warfare rather than the primary emphasis on mountain and desert war. Fifty officers of the Indian command were sent to Australia and New Guinea to study jungle warfare. They were attached to fighting units for about three months for first hand experience.⁸¹ Finally, the West African soldiers were battle tested. During the East African campaign, units of the West African force proved that they could fight well in modern war. The best training a soldier or formation can have is actual combat. That was why the West African force was most qualified to be sent to South-East Asia to help in the reconquest of Burma.

Footnotes

1. A.Haywood and F.A.S. Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force (Aldershot, 1964), p.31.
2. Ibid.
3. S.C. Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (December 1966), Vol.3, p.486.
4. Ibid, p.493.
5. Ibid, p.495.
6. C.O African (West) No.582, The Military Position of the French in West Africa by Maj. Barnardiston, February 28, 1899; S.C. Ukpabi, "Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.496.
7. S.C. Ukpabi, "Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.497.
8. Chamberlain Papers - McCallum to J.C. 8/12/97 and 13/3/98 in S.C. Ukpabi, "Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.490.
9. C.O. African (West) No.565, War Office to Colonial Office, January 28, 1898; S.C. Ukpabi, "Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.499.
10. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.31.
11. Ibid, pp.31-32.
12. S.C. Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.486. Ukpabi contends that the origin of the force was strictly as a "counter against the French during the critical period of the Anglo-French rivalry."
13. Michael Crowder, West Africa under Colonial Rule (Evanston, 1968), pp.23-31. The change in economic relationship is discussed in further detail.
14. S.C.Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.493.
15. J.J. Crooks, Gold Coast Records, pp.212-213 in S.C. Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.489.

16. Colonial Office Paper No.588, June 1899 in Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.37.
17. Ibid, pp.39-40 and 248.
18. Ibid, pp.87-99. The authors discuss some of the operations where these tactics was employed.
19. Ibid, p.99.
20. Ibid, p.105.
21. Ibid, p.176.
22. Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, p.27. The figures have been a matter of controversy. Sir Charles Lucas, ed., The Empire at War, who also used this source, argues that the figures should be higher because carriers for the soldiers should have been included. Nevertheless, the numbers are as follows:
- | | Europeans | Africans |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------|
| Nigeria Regiment | 1587 | 13,980 |
| Gold Coast Regiment | 397 | 9,890 |
| Sierra Leone Regiment | 48 | 646 |
| Gambia Company | 20 | 351 |
23. Sir George Giffard, "The Royal West African Frontier Force and its Expansion for War", Army Quarterly, p.190.
24. C.G. Bowen, "Service in West Africa", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, August 1948. The author in West Africa before World War II and also with the West African Forces in Burma. Reacting to F.A.S. Clarke's article, "The Military and Economic Importance of West Africa", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution, November 1947, Bowen shows that non African soldiers had access to social amenities like golf courses, tennis courts and polo fields. Moreover, they were not stationed in the swampy and coastal areas where the incidence of malaria might be greater and help foster the impression that West Africa was the "White Mans Grave".
25. West Africa Magazine, December 30, 1944. This view was offered in a broadcast from Calcutta by Captain Sommers on how troops were recruited and it represents the colonial government's view. It is also expressed in Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.369. They contend that with an increase in vehicles and other equipments resulted in greater knowledge of the interior and the ability to reach

greater masses, which made recruitment smoother and easy.

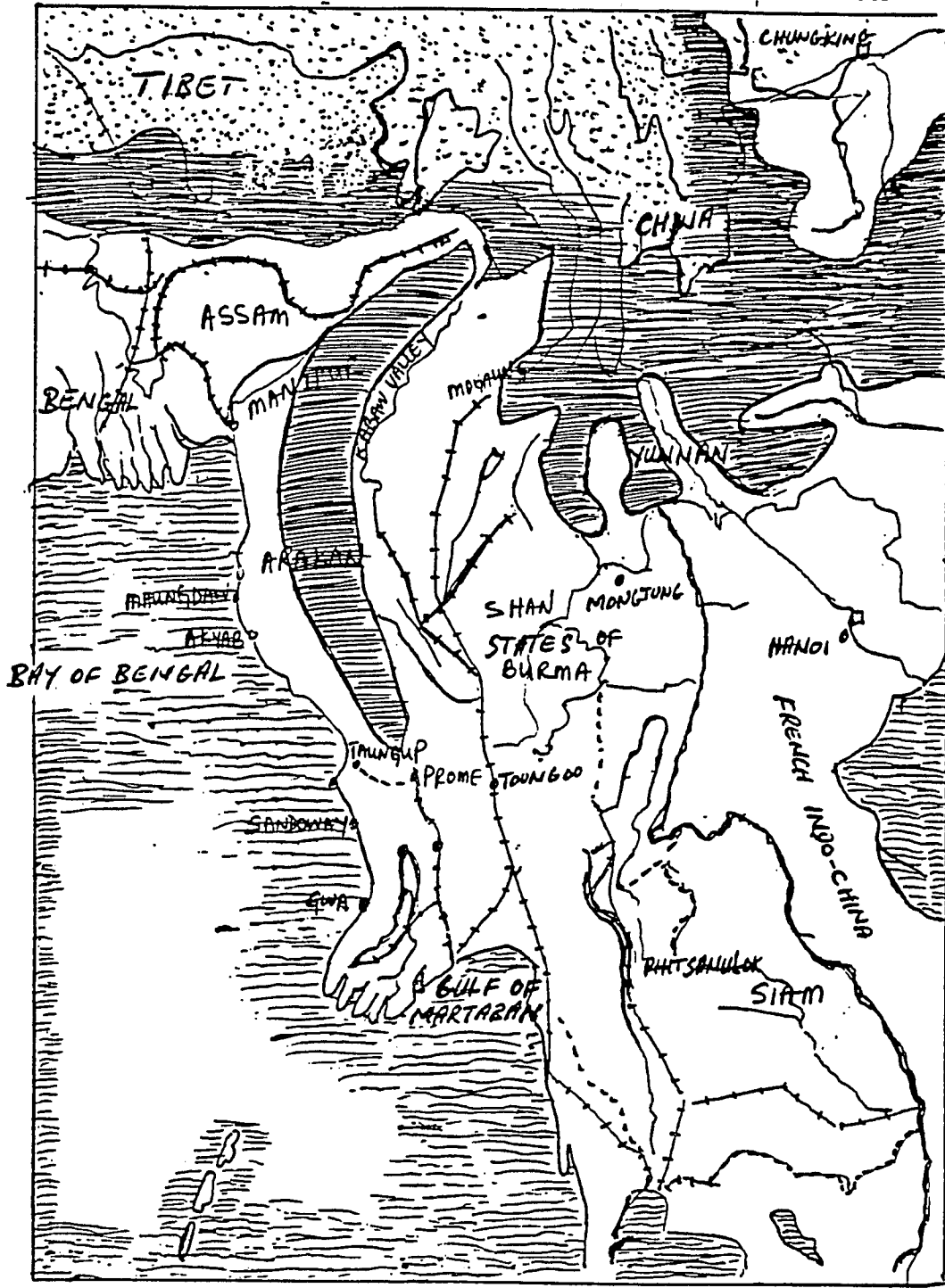
26. This view derives from the writers discussion with his father, Chief S.B.C. Osakwe 1916-1988, who served with the R.W.A.F.F. in Lagos, Nigeria, during World War 11 and later as an administrative officer in the then Eastern Nigeria government.
27. A.E. Afigbo, Ropes of Sand, Studies in Igbo Culture and History (Nsukka, Nigeria, 1981), p.320.
28. F.A.S. Clarke, "The Development of the West African Forces in the Second World War", Army Quarterly (October, 1947), p.70.
29. A.S. Irwin, "Jungle Warfare", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution (August, 1945). Irwin had a long experience in bush warfare. He served during the Second World War and was a member of the Burma Patriot Force. In this article, he was reacting to an earlier argument to the contrary by C.J. Bradford, "Jungle Warfare", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution (May 1945), pp.185-186.
30. F.A.S. Clarke, "The Development of the West African Forces in the Second World War", p.72.
31. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.323.
32. PRO, WO 173/626. Memo: 5th Training School West Africa.
33. F.A.S. Clarke, "The Development of the West African Forces in the Second World War", p.72.
34. R.E.R. Smallwood, "Developing the K.A.R.", Army Quarterly (January 1945), pp.214-216.
35. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.365.
36. RG, 331, National Archives: South East Asia Command War Diary, 1st March 1945, Minutes of meeting held to discuss question in connection with the East and West African Forces in this theater. Hereafter, NA/SEAC War Diary.
37. West Africa Magazine, February 3, 1940.
38. Field Marshal the Viscount Slim, Defeat into Victory (London, 1956), p.164.
39. Sir George Giffard, "The Royal West African Frontier Force and its Expansion for War", p.190.

40. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.325.
41. See address of the Secretary of the Colonies, Mr. Malcolm Macdonald, printed verbatim in West Africa Magazine, October 21, 1939.
42. Ibid, November 11, 1939.
43. Sir George Giffard, "The Royal West African Frontier Force and its Expansion for War", p.191. See also Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.503.
44. PRO, WO 106/2901. Telegram to West African Governors Conference, July 2, 1941.
45. Ibid, loose minute: Polish Officers serving in West Africa, February 13, 1941.
46. Actual numbers is hard to procure since reinforcements were made during their tenure from 1941 to 1945.
47. PRO, WO 106/2901. Record of discussion between the Polish representative, M.G. Regulski, and representatives of the War Office.
48. Ibid, GOC in C West Africa to C in C Middle East, September 2, 1942.
49. A cursory perusal of the newspapers and magazines especially the nationalists West African Pilot, and the West African Magazine from January 1939 to January 1940, shows an overwhelming willingness to actively participate and contribute financially to the war effort.
50. Sir George Giffard, "The Royal West African Frontier Force and its Expansion for War", p.195.
51. Ibid, p.194. However, in his book, Defeat into Victory, pp.165-166, Slim observed that the West African units he saw in the Arakan had a high proportion of European officers. It is not clear why, but perhaps he saw mainly senior officers who were mostly Europeans. Unlike the Indian units where he served for the greater part of his military career, Indians were dominant in Indian units.
52. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, Chapter 6.
53. East African Campaign Air Support (Reel 23353), United

States Air Force Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. Hereafter, USAF, Alabama.

54. M.N. Hennessey, "The Nigerian Advance from Mogadishu to Harrar", Army Quarterly (October 1948), p.65.
55. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.372.
56. Ibid.
57. Michael Crowder, West Africa Under Colonial Rule, p.491.
58. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.363.
59. Sir George Giffard, "The Royal West African Frontier Force and its Expansion for War", p.194.
60. Martin L. Mickelson, "Operation Susan: The Origins of the Free French Movement", Military Affairs (October 1988), p. 192.
61. _PRO, WO 106/2858. "Report on the Expedition to install in Dakar, Gen. de Gaulle and his Free French Forces, 4th August to 29th September 1940."
62. _PRO, WO 173/627. War Office to General Headquarters West Africa, 1st January 1943.
63. Ibid. See appendix one and two for the TOE on the divisions.
64. Despatch by Gen. Archibald Wavell (covering reports by Lt. Gen. T.J. Hutton and Gen. The Honorable Sir Harold Alexander) on operations in Burma from 15th December 1941 to 20th May 1942, London Gazette No.38228, paragraph 5.
65. Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed., Command Decisions (Center of Military History, U.S. Army, Washington D.C., 1984) pp.173-198.
66. _PRO, WO 173/627. GOC in C's Address, 14 March 1943.
67. See appendix one and two.
68. Ibid, See also PRO, WO CRWA/12802/G 19th July 1943.
69. _PRO, WO 173/634. Appendix B, 81 Division Training Memorandum.

70. Ibid, Appendix E, No.1, Engineer Training Instruction.
71. Ibid, 81 (W.A.) Division Training Memorandum No.4, April 28, 1943.
72. Ibid, Appendix I, 81 (W.A.) Division Battle Drills, May 23, 1943.
73. PRO, WO 173/642. 82nd (W.A.) Training Directive No.1, September 1943.
74. See appendix 1.
75. West African Pilot, February 26, 1945.
76. Sir Wilfrid Lindsell, "The Development of India as a base for Military Operations", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution (May 1947), p.223.
77. Ibid, p.224.
78. S.C. Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force", p.490.
79. For instance the 82nd Division although officially formed in August of 1943, started forming in January 1943. However, with insufficient officers and having to contend with raw recruits, this division was constantly in training until they were deemed fit to embark for South-East Asia by the end of the year. They, however, did not engage in combat until the fall of 1944.
80. B. Prasad, Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, 1939-1945; The Arakan Operations, 1942-1945 (Delhi, 1966), Vol.3, p.32.
81. Despatch by Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, C in C India on Operations in the Indo-Burma Theater based on India, 21 June 1943 to 15 November, 1943 (London Gazette, No.39173), paragraphs 8 to 19.



BURMA AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

Chapter Two

The Importance of the Arakan Front and Allied Plans to Reconquer Burma.

The campaign to reconquer Burma in 1943 was broadly executed on three fronts, namely: The North Combat Area Command (N.C. A.C.) under Lt. Gen. Joseph Stillwell; The Central Front under the operational direction of Lt. Gen. William Slim's Fourteenth Army and the Arakan Front, up to the fall of 1944, also under the operational direction of Lt. Gen. Slim.

The Burma theater in the Second World War had four major terrain features which extended generally in a north and south direction. They were the Shan plateau, the valley region in the centre, the long mountain rib in the west and the narrow Arakan coastal strip. On these features, there were a series of mountain ranges which descend in a north to south direction from about twelve thousand feet to about two thousand feet in the Arakan. The major features of these ranges are their precipitous sides and the fast flowing rivers in the deep valleys. For the most part the vegetation is forest and jungle. The undergrowth is dense and often times interspersed with bamboo. In the Arakan, however, there are two ranges in the Mayu Peninsula and another between

the Rivers Kalapanzin and Kaladan. The lower slopes of the ridge are covered with ordinary jungle. Further down, the ordinary jungle gives way to bamboo which, during combat, has to be cut to be able to penetrate. This sector was where the West African force served.

Arakan's communication with the Central Plain of Burma, from the Arakan Yoma, is minimal. Here a couple of jungle tracks lead across this barrier to the Irrawaddy; one is the An Pass, and still further down the coast there is a fair motor road from Taungup to Prome. This is the sum of Arakan's communication with the central front.

The climate of Arakan, like that of the rest of Burma, is affected by two monsoons, the north-east from November to May and the south-west from about the middle of May to October. The south-west monsoon period is the rainy season. The average rainfall range from about twenty-five inches in northern Burma to about two hundred inches in the Arakan. At this time, malaria becomes prevalent and the small leeches of the jungle abound. The yellow and green elephant leeches lurk in the pools of the jungle. Heat and ringworm help to make life uncomfortable. Soldiers manning defences in bivouacs tried to build their posts with bamboo about two feet high but carefully camouflaged and defiladed from view. Alarm posts were of bunker types with a top cover to keep rain

away. During the season of heavy rains, the Arakan chaungs (waterways) rise from about two feet to about six feet and become unfordable by infantry. These unceasing rains turn Arakan, a rice growing area, into a muddy swamp impassable to wheeled vehicles, and make the native tracks very slippery. During the dry season, from November to May, leeches are replaced by the jungle tick that carry the scrub typhus germ. Snakes and scorpions give way to large numbers of the reddish-brown poisonous centipedes. During the dry season, heavy dew and mist cover the valleys up to around 10:00 hours and hampers visibility.¹

In the dubious business of war pleasant terrain is not always expected, but the Arakan was a nightmare for the soldiers that served there. The Arakan demands initiative from the individual soldier or small unit, because the precipitous jungle terrain will not allow for deployment of a large marching army. In such terrain, consistent supplies are crucial. Tactical air support will be difficult because the location of the ground units will not be easy due to the dense jungle and forest. Air supply will not be easy since the terrain is characterized by jungled slopes, valleys and mountains, and drop zones or landing strips will be hard to clear and find. Prompt evacuation of casualties, an important factor in morale, would be a major problem due to either lengthy treks from the frontline to the base or lack of air

strips for evacuation. Due to the lack of motor roads, extra labor would be needed to carry supplies and ammunition. Later, it was realized that in "... South-East Asia, mainly owing to the less developed state of the countries, far more men were needed to keep a division in the field than in Europe. Whereas in Normandy the number was about forty thousand, in South-East Asia it approached fifty-six thousand or seventy thousand including civil labour (which in 1944 reached a total of nearly four hundred thousand, including civil contractors and labour employed by the U.S. forces in the command)".² In the Arakan, artillery and tank support might not be possible because of the terrain. In 1942, before the reconquest ensued in full force, there was one metalled road and a few jungle tracks. In the end, therefore, the Arakan front was to be strictly an infantryman's war.

But as the Arakan was one of the most unsuitable fronts in the Second World War, historians have turned it into an unsuitable front to study when writing about the Burma theater. The Arakan front, they contend, was a side-show in the Burma theater. As a result, the Official History of the Indian Armed Forces conclude that although, "the Arakan front brought unestimated success to the South-East Asia command and contributed, though not decisively to the reconquest of Burma, it will be correct to say that in the overall effort,

for the defeat of Japan, the value of these operations was not very great."3 But this evaluation from the Official History is far from being a dispassionate conclusion. The reason for this conclusion originates from the fact that India Armed Forces up until the beginning of the Second World War were not good in jungle warfare. As a result operations in such terrain did not interest them and this has carried on into their military history literature. Indeed, all their pre-war campaign plans were centered on desert warfare and the defense of their north-west frontier (not Burma) against a possible Soviet Union attack.4 The de-emphasis on jungle warfare made it easy for Japan to conquer Burma in the early part of the Burma campaign. It took well trained jungle soldiers and massive allied support to defend India and rout the Japanese Army from Burma.

But with regard to the Arakan front, if the pre-eminent goal of the allied army was the destruction of the enemy army and, if the allied army in the Arakan was able to destroy the Japanese army, it would be correct to say that in the overall effort for the defeat of Japan, the value of these operations was high. Furthermore, the mere fact that the campaign to reconquer Burma in 1943 began in the Arakan underlies the importance of that front. It was there that the new allied tactics, involving the maintenance of large units (divisions) by air and having them fight in "boxes" was first practised.

The first Battle of the Box was in the Arakan -the battle of Ngakyedauk Pass, or the Battle of the Administrative Box. Without any land line of communication, the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions were able to beat the Japanese tactic of infiltration and encirclement designed to isolate and destroy an army. Indeed, when it was replicated in the defense of Imphal and Kohima, the 5th and 7th Divisions were there to show what they had already learned in the Arakan.⁵ The Arakan front was a good laboratory for the new allied tactics designed for the reconquest of Burma.

Mention has been made earlier that the reconquest of Burma was executed on three fronts. The importance of each can be gleaned from the fact that the planning of offensives was structured in such a way that each would be complimented by operations in the other. For instance, the earlier failure in Arakan in the spring of 1943 has been attributed to the lack of complimentary effort on other fronts. During that operation, Stilwell's Chinese armies in the Yunan were to advance into upper Burma. The IV Corps from Assam were to advance with them. But due to administrative difficulties, IV Corps could not advance with them and Stilwell's Chinese forces were unable to move with either. The result was that the Japanese army in the Arakan was able to be reinforced and the limited offensive ended a failure.⁶ But, when the final drive to reconquer Burma began, all fronts were on the

offensive. It ended in success.

Finally, Arakan was an important strategic base for all the armies involved. The Japanese, holding the important town of Akyab in Arakan, intended to forestall any allied offensive along the coast of Bengal, which was an important line of communication for them. Akyab was also important because it was a good base to mount air attacks on Calcutta if and when the march on Delhi begin. If it was this important to the Japanese army, the destruction of the Japanese force there and the control of Arakan was vital to the allied plans for the reconquest of Burma.

For the reconquest of Burma to be complete, the allied force planned to invest the port city and capital of Burma, Rangoon. The closest land base from which an amphibious offensive could be mounted on Rangoon was on the Arakan frontier.⁷ Furthermore, to control the Bay of Bengal was to hold a sword over the Japanese supply line. To achieve that, the control of the coastal strip of Arakan was vital. The importance of Arakan also was that it was an avenue of approach to the port of Chittagong and northwards to the Brahmaputra river, across which supplies for the allied forces in the theater had to be ferried.

What's more, Arakan was an essential corollary to any

operations on the central front. In the event of a landward advance on Rangoon on the central front, air bases in Akyab were necessary. The 14th Army would be stopped if it moved passed Meiktila, which was beyond two hundred and fifty miles, the economic range of the Dakotas (C-47) operating from Assam.⁸ The Akyab base was both necessary and important.

In conclusion, the Arakan operations contributed immensely in the reconquest of Burma and the destruction of the Japanese army in the theater. Simply, the Arakan front was not a side-show because allied forces, especially in the Burma theater, did not have much men and materiel for side-shows.

To fully understand the story of any force that served in the Arakan during the reconquest, a cursory review of earlier allied campaigns on that front is necessary. Japan in order to create and defend her co-prosperity area invaded agricultural and oil-rich Burma in the winter of 1941-42. The invasion was ultimately to end with a march on Delhi and the installation of a pro-Japanese government. The initial loss of Burma was a result of the lack of resources to defend it.⁹ The invasion of Burma sealed off an important supply route for China. This also brought the United States into the picture because she was, among other things, serving as a protector of China. Nevertheless, backed with overwhelming

air superiority, town after town fell from the winter of 1941/42 until the south-west monsoon slowed down the rapid advance of the Japanese army. But the outmanned and relatively untrained allied force was disciplined enough to be withdrawn intact without being destroyed by the Japanese. The allied forces took this period to recruit, train, and plan on how to reconquer Burma.

In Arakan, from the time of the invasion, the Japanese established a strong base in the town of Akyab. For the allies the top priority was how to neutralize the base. The initial plan called for an amphibious landing to secure Akyab. However, a landward advance was planned as a back-up.¹⁰ But the frequent changes of plans in the Burma theater as a whole were so notorious that a satirist writing later characterized the sequence of events:

Plan followed plan in swift procession
Commanders went, commanders came
While telegrams in swift succession
Arrived to douse or fan the flame.¹¹

In any event, due to the lack of the necessary resources because of demands in the Mediterranean at this time, the amphibious plan was cancelled. A limited landward offensive to the general line Donbaik - Rathedaung was planned for early 1943. But the allied army was still insufficiently trained and they maintained their road-bound tactics. The offensive met well emplaced machine guns and mortar fire. The tanks of the 47th and 55th Indian Brigades were quickly

knocked out. By May 1943, the 14th and 26th Indian Divisions were not only back to their starting line but weaker by two thousand five hundred killed and wounded. It greatly lowered morale.¹² Furthermore, in course of the operation, Stilwell's Chinese armies in Yunan were to advance into upper Burma and the IV Corps was to advance from Assam in co-operation with them. But due to unforeseen administrative problems these forces were unable to join. The Japanese force in Arakan was reinforced when one battalion of the 33rd Japanese Division entered the Kaladan through the Arakan Yoma. The result was that the allied army was defeated, but not destroyed, and that morale and prestige were lowered on the front and in the theater.

As the Supreme Commander succinctly observed, the troops were insufficiently trained, and they were left in the jungle in contact with the enemy for over three months without rest. Thus, he opined that there was need for rotation, reinforcements and a significant reserve.¹³ The issue of training was important because the Japanese army not only out-manned them at the initial stage but also out-fought them due to the lack of proper jungle training in the allied army. Throughout the period of the limited offensive, it was observed, the allied army had a road-bound tactical mentality. In consequence, the Japanese army infiltrated and out-flanked allied positions. They constantly threatened land

lines of communication. Also the Japanese enjoyed air superiority. However, helped by the on-set of the monsoon, when active military operations receded, the allied army was good enough to withdraw intact, to rethink their tactics and strategy and plan for future operations.

The new allied plan for the reconquest of Burma included the employment of West African forces and the massive use of air supply. However, the first step was the setting up of the South East Asia Command. Before the establishment of the South East Asia Command, India's Eastern Army had operational control over Burma. But on October 15, 1943, with the establishment of the South East Asia Command, the Eastern Command was split into Eastern Command, India, under Lt. Gen. A.G.O.M. Mayne and Fourteenth Army, under Lt.Gen. Slim. The Fourteenth Army was responsible for the operations in the British sphere in Burma, which included the Central and Arakan fronts. To link it with the Allied Command, the Fourteenth Army was under the Eleventh Army Group commanded by Lt.Gen. Giffard. Eleventh Army Group consisted of Ceylon Army Command, Indian Ocean garrisons, Nepalese troops from the Kingdom of Nepal, who were also represented in the Gurkha battalions of the Indian Army furnished for the South East Asia Command. But the Eleventh Army was not totally allied because during the ensuing operations Stilwell, the commander of the United States and Chinese forces, refused to serve

under the Eleventh Army. He argued that, being the deputy Supreme Allied Commander, he could not serve under Gen. Giffard's Eleventh Army. But his willingness to serve under Gen. Slim's Fourteenth Army which was under the Eleventh makes his argument weak and not clear. Perhaps, Stilwell was using this situation to say that he would rather work with Slim, who was a very aggressive field commander, than Giffard, who was the consummate military administrator. Whatever it was, the Eleventh Army in reality was the British arm of the allied South-East Asia Command. The South East Asia command headquarters was based in India, alongside General Headquarters India - an all Indian Command-consisted of the Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, and his commanders. They were Admiral James Somerville, Eastern Fleet; Giffard, Eleventh Army Group; Air Chief Marshal Richard Peirse for Air Command. The close harmony that existed between the two set-ups in India, considering the interests of the British, Chinese and the United States, can only be explained by the fact that the situation in Burma was desperate, and the defeat of a common enemy paramount. One command, the South East Asia command, was defending Burma and the India Command had Burma as one of her boundaries. While it true that the China, Burma, India theater (CBI) was supposed to be one theater, it was in reality three theaters. Of the dominant powers, the United States was primarily concerned with China, and Great Britain

with India. Burma became a fragile marriage between the two and all the other allied nations. But as luck would have it, the varying interests was not detrimental to the military operations.

Meanwhile, the Fifteenth Indian Corps, then under the Fourteenth Army, was given the responsibility of executing the reconquest plans in the Arakan.¹⁴ On the Arakan front, proper training of units in jungle warfare and the massing of an overwhelming force was part of the allied plan for the reconquest. Part of this massing of troops was to be the use of the West African Force.

After a long and circuitous sail from the port of Lagos, Nigeria, via the Cape of Good Hope, the troops of the 81st Division were the first to arrive in India and were stationed at various locations like Deolali, Nasik, Dhond, Kedgaono, Mashral, etc. The stationing of the units at various locations was for two reasons. First was the role of India, housing almost every nationality, and the attendant need for various infrastructures. Secondly, the need to train the troops in terrains similar to those they would see in the Arakan. But at sea, they were given general training in staff duties, control of crowds and demonstrations, knowledge of India and its people, and conditions in India. On arrival, training emphasis was on security. Unlike the Japanese, no

documents or maps except those indispensable to the operations at hand, were to be taken into action, and none was to be left behind; all were to be burnt or destroyed. Divisional and Field Headquarters were to have security officers. Understanding the Japanese constant attempts at outflanking and infiltration tactics, it was stressed that everybody was primarily a fighting soldier. The Divisional Headquarters was also a fighting body.⁹ All sentries were to be concealed. Furthermore, due to the questionable loyalty of the Moghs, Mrungs and Kunmis, the major tribal groups in the Kaladan valley of Arakan, guides were not to be allowed to lead patrols.¹⁵

Between the months of October and November many exercises were conducted to help raise the combat readiness of the troops. They included Exercise "Vengeance", designed to familiarize the divisional staff with the machinery for obtaining air support, air recce, air photographs and to demonstrate what would be reasonable to expect from the air forces. Exercise "Headload" helped in the practise of the carrying of war material by auxiliary troops to frontline soldiers. Exercise "Headphone" was done in consort with divisional signals and brigade headquarters. It tested the signal communications within the division. Finally, with regard to its attachment to the Fourteenth Army, the division had exercises designed to practise the internal working of

the headquarters, setting up, packing up and moving in the dark, which was the proper time to move in the jungle.

Among students of the Burma war, the recurring question has been, why was the Arakan front chosen for the West African Force? Since the Arakan front demanded three types of soldiers; those trained in amphibious war because of the prevalent chaungs; jungle trained soldiers because of the vegetation; and assault troops because of the strong Japanese base, the 81st Division was detailed to the Arakan because they had either been trained or involved in such combat operations. For instance, Giffard, specifically, suggested they be used in assault landings. He pointed out that their ability to move barefoot was an advantage in boat work, and the fact that they spoke better English than their East African counterparts were also assets.¹⁶ In any event, however, the XV Indian Corps detailed the 81st Division to the Kaladan valley in the offensive scheduled to start around December-January of 1943/1944. But the question was how this division was to be maintained in the trackless jungles of Arakan. The idea of supplying units by air is as old as the history of air war. It was a possible solution to the problem. But the history of air supply had been for the supply of small units for a short duration. But air supply in the Arakan had to be for large units -divisions- and the duration of the conflict was indefinite. However, to the

allied advantage was the experience gained from the supply of Wingate's force in early 1943 during the limited offensive of that year. Thus, organization for and the use of air supply and air support featured prominently during the reconquest.

Air supply was by far the most important element for the 81st Division in the campaigns in the Kaladan valley. The advance elements of the division began their march down the Kaladan around the 12th of December 1943 and they were initially supplied by the 31st (RAF) squadron based in Agartala. But the entire supply of the division was the responsibility of the 62nd (RAF) squadron - a re-equipped Hudson Squadron -based in Comilla but operating from the supply base in Chandina, nine miles from Comilla.¹⁷ This squadron became operational from 7th January 1944. But for air supply to be successful, air supremacy had to be attained.

Before the allied reconquest began in the Fall of 1943, air supremacy was in the hands of the Japanese. During this period of air ascendancy, the Japanese force failed to maximize the advantages of air superiority, as in the air supply of their forward units. Japanese military leaders saw air power as an adjunct, an ancillary weapon perhaps, useful to land operations.¹⁸ They did not visualize an air war or the exploitation of air victory. As a result, even with

improvements in the quality of their aircraft, they could not mass produce so as to establish strength in numbers. After the initial conquest of Burma, Japanese air operations were given low priority by their command. The bulk of their replacement pilots were sent to the South-West Pacific in preference to South-East Asia.¹⁹ In fact, some of the units were moved in the winter of 1943-44 as reinforcements to the South West Pacific. But allied air power was increasing tremendously, and was soon to overtake them. Allied air power grew from little air presence during the Japanese invasion to about seven hundred and nineteen aircraft, including naval aircraft, in Burma and Siam.²⁰ In the end, the control of the air made air supply possible in the Kaladan, as elsewhere in Burma.

Successful air-supply of the 81st Division was a result of the close co-operation between the army, the air force and the many units established for air supply. The crews of the 62nd squadron, on a supply run consisted of the pilot, co-pilot, radio operator and for a new objective, a navigator.²¹ To drop supplies the crew consisted of three enlisted personnel from the shipping organization trained in the art of supply dropping - 'the kicking and handling'. The Dakota (C-47), the principal aircraft used, was believed to be the most suitable. It had good range and payload, and it was easy to load, a three ton lorry to each aircraft. The

Commando (C-46) was faster and had a better payload than the Dakota but was difficult to load because the door was eight feet high above the ground. They also needed longer and better landing strips than the Dakota. They quickly broke up the fair weather or paddy landing strips.²² The flight to the objective was made normally at the minimum altitude necessary to cross the intervening mountains. Once in the valley, they flew a few hundred feet above tree top level to avoid being observed by enemy aircraft or air defenses. Air to ground communication was done through a special code changed daily in the squadrons. Further information was transmitted on the same wave length. Landing was preferred to dropping because flying time is reduced in circuiting the drop zone. Secondly, aircraft would be available for backloading and evacuation of casualties. Thirdly, greater payload would be possible because supply dropping equipment would not have to be carried. Finally, less personnel would be involved because none will be needed for ejection of supplies. Furthermore, unloading an aircraft takes less men than collecting supplies flung all over the drop zones. But if landing was not possible, the drop zone had to be carefully selected.

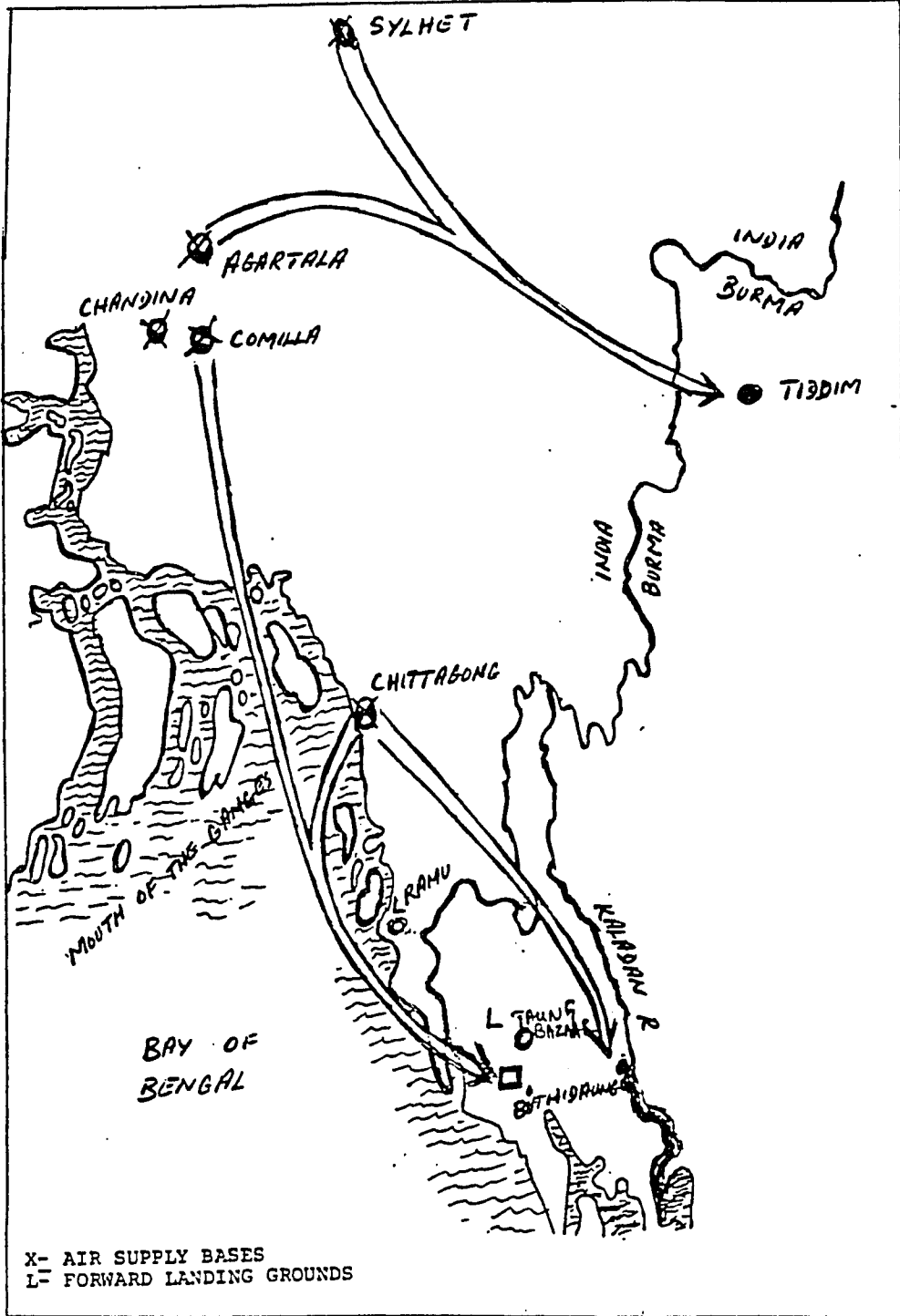
The drop zones were required to be near a landmark identifiable from the air. Secondly, they were to be sited into the wind. The zone was to be as large as possible up to about one thousand yards. A good zone was likely to determine

objective by a red light installed near the door. The signal to drop was given by a green light or a bell installed near the door and operated by the pilot. About six to eight containers could be ejected during one pass over the target. The minimum time expended over a target was about twenty minutes.²³ Sorties were flown around 0600 and 0800 hours so as to take advantage of the good flying weather. In the event of additional sorties, they were flown around 1300 hours. The availability of fighter escorts made day time supply possible and thus minimized wastage of drops that occurs frequently at night. Opposition to supply drops came mainly from enemy ground small arms fire. However, there were occasional interruptions during supply drops from enemy aircraft. In all, the supply effort was so successful that the 62nd Squadron in the most tasking period of the campaign for the 81st Division was able to accomplish the following:

MONTH 1944	SORTIES	TONS SUPPLIED
January	279	1,033
February	526	1,789
March	584	2,013

Statistically, the increase in sorties and tons supplied explains the success of the supply effort.²⁴

One interesting aspect of air supply in Burma was the lack of intra-service rivalry. Air supply was rather an amorphous organization of the Royal Air Force and the United States



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Army Air Force in a multi-national theater. The marriage of these bed-fellows was consummated by the integration of their headquarters with officers of both countries and at the various headquarters of the subordinate organizations involved in the supply effort. The establishment of air transport liaison officers helped reduce inter-service rivalry. The liaison officers acted as army staff officers to airforce formations and kept them in close touch with the military situation. They ensured that squadrons were conversant with army matters and in full receipt of up to date military information so that air crews could be properly briefed. On the other hand, they made sure that air crews were properly interrogated for information of military value and that such information was passed immediately to the army formation concerned. The role of the transport liaison officers, therefore, is a testament of how inter-service rivalry can be avoided.

But the reliance on air supply, has its disadvantages. It relied too much on weather and terrain. It relied on two arms of service, a risky situation considering the possibility of inter-service rivalry and the ability to maintain air superiority. Relatively little enemy air action can disrupt a supply drop and thus undermine the ability of ground forces to carry out operations. Above all, it involved a lot of personnel. On the one hand, troops were needed to do the

garrisoning of supply dumps and the building of air strips. On the other, a lot of personnel had to be involved in the packing and loading of the aircraft. For instance, when the ground echelon reached its peak, averaging seventy thousand tons per month in the Burma theater, about thirty-five thousand officers were involved.²⁵ Finally, because of the wear and tear on the aircraft, it relied on the prompt maintenance of all mechanical paraphernalia involved in the supply effort, especially the aircraft.

In the Arakan, as elsewhere, the advantages coupled with the incompetence of the Japanese air arm out-weighed its disadvantages. Air supply made it possible to maintain divisions in the jungles without any land line of communication and the attendant threat to one's supply line. It therefore offered greater mobility for the forces relying on it. Offensives might be launched no matter the inhibitions of the terrain. Moreover, air supply can easily be turned into air assault. Furthermore, some of the planes employed in air supply were used to evacuate casualties. Air supply, it must be noted, did not only involve the evacuation of casualties, and supply of ammunition and food but, helped in the important matter of transfer of personnel from one front to another. For instance the successful transfer of the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions after the "Battle of the Box" to help in the defence of Imphal and Kohima, accrued from the

success of the supply effort. Air supply, in the end helped to de-mystify the myth of the jungle.

In conclusion, a caveat must be registered that though air supply was well organized, it was a wholesale effort in improvisation and expediency. Aircraft were juggled from one front to another as the need arose.²⁶ For the divisions that relied on air supply, it curtailed their plans to some extent. In the 81st Division, planned operations were not significantly hampered by a shortage of supplies due to lack of air supply. It proved so successful that the appreciation of the divisional commander, Major General C.G. Woolner, says it all:

"No words of mine can do justice to the achievements of the R.A.F. in support of the division. Their faultless supply dropping, the skill with which they landed their Dakotas on our airstrips in rapid succession, the devotion of the Moth pilots in evacuating casualties, the promptitude and their air strikes, the plentiful supply of air photographs which they provided, together with the air letter services and daily message dropping taken together, constituted an outstanding effort of co-operation. Above all, there was a most heartening feeling of comradeship between the two services."²⁷

Footnotes

1. The source of information on the topography, climate and general characteristics of Burma are the following: Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp.376-380; Frank Owen, The Campaign in Burma (London, 1946), p.125; Maj. Gen.Kirby S. Woodburn, ed., The War Against Japan (London, 1965), Vol.IV, pp.253-255; Gen. George Giffard, Despatch on Operations in Burma and North-East India from November 1943 to 22nd June 1944, London Gazette #39171, paragraphs 139-140.
2. Vice Admiral, the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Commander, South East Asia, 1943-45 (London, 1950), see footnote on p.8.
3. Bisheshwar Prasad ed., Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War, The Arakan Operations, Vol.3 (Orient Longmans, 1954),p.xxx.
4. Ibid. India and the War, Vol.17, (1966),p.32
5. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraphs 191-201. Any standard study of the Burma theater will also contain the Imphal and Kohima campaign since it has constantly been emphasis on as the battle that won the war.
6. Field Marshal The Viscount Wavell, Despatch on Operations in the India Command from 1st January 1943 to 20th June 1943, London Gazette #38266, paragraph 16.
7. There was a landward route to Rangoon from the central plain of Burma but the distance and the time consideration due the terrain difficulties, the weather, morale and availability of supplies made alternative plans crucial. The low priority placed on the Burma theater can lead to supplies being taken from Burma for other theaters.
8. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraph 343.
9. Field Marshal The Viscount Wavell, Despatch on Operations in the Eastern Theatre based on India from March 1942 to December 31, 1942, London Gazette #37728, paragraphs 1-10.

10. Memo: "Note on the Feasibility of the capture of Akyab in Spring 1944", June 28, 1944, Box 100, RG331, NA, SEAC War Diary.
11. PRO, REDW 2/18 (Ralph Edwards Papers) in Philip Zeigler, Mountbatten (London, 1985), p.264.
12. Field Marshal The Viscount Wavell, Despatch on Operations in the India Command from January 1, 1943 to 20th June, 1943, London Gazette #38266, paragraphs 6-16. See also Joe G.Taylor, Air Supply in the Burma Campaign, p.12.
13. "Supreme Commanders Personal Minute on Cause of Failure in Arakan", November 4, 1943, Doc.#11/43, Box 98, RG 331, NA, SEAC War Diary.
14. On the multinational structure of South-East Asia Command, see: Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraphs 6 to 77.
15. PRO,WO 172/4054: West African Tactical Notes, Appendix J.
16. Doc.#366/43, October 3, 1943, Box 98, RG 331, NA, SEAC War Diary.
17. U.S.A.A.F., Alabama, Eastern Air Command, South-East Asia (Air Transport Operations in Burma, 1941-1944), (Microfilm Reel A8057).
18. U.S.A.A.F., Alabama, Royal Air Force Far East Campaigns, (Microfilm Reel 23354).
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Lt.Col. J.R.L. Rumsey, "Air Supply in Burma", Army Quarterly (October 1947), p.37.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. U.S.A.A.F., Alabama, Eastern Air Command South-East Asia (Air Transport Operations in Burma, 1941-1944), (Microfilm Reel A8057).
25. Lt.Col.J.R.L. Rumsey, "Air Supply In Burma", Army Quarterly (October 1947), p.41.

26. This view runs through Joe G. Taylor's book, Air Supply in the Burma Campaign.
27. U.S.A.A.F., Alabama, Royal Air Force Far East Campaigns (Microfilm Reel 23354). For a detailed study on air supply in Burma, see: Joe G. Taylor, Air Supply in the Burma Campaign, #75 (Alabama, 1957).

Chapter Three

The Spider: Operations of the 81st (W.A.) Division

The spider in African folklore is considered clever. She can use her web to capture bigger ants. It was this idea that was carried on in making it the insignia of the 81st Division. Like the spider, the 81st Division was a relatively small force but also did extraordinary things.

The military operations of the 81st in the Kaladan and the Kalapanzin valleys involved, in the main, extensive patrolling operations. The operations at Kanwa and Pagoda hill were essentially the only pitched battles. In some accounts of military history patrolling operations tend to be viewed as less arduous, risky and an indecisive form of battle. The way it was practised in the Kaladan was different because of the size of the forces involved and the terrain. All battles are basically the same in that they involve the possibility of actual death and destruction. In fact, patrolling operations are even more than usually demanding because they constantly required the initiative of the junior officers. But in pitched battles the initiative and decision-making tend to come from the general-command headquarters.

In any event, the operations of the 81st were a success. The setback at Pagoda hill does not represent evidence of an untrained and ineffective army. But rather an army that was

a victim of logistics and poor command decisions. It is also important to point out that their subsequent move to the Kalapanzin was not, as often described, an attempt to further boost the morale of an army that lost Pagoda hill. If anything, it was a tacit expression of the confidence bestowed on this unit.

The entire Burma country including the coastal plain of Arakan had fallen to the Japanese army in late 1941, and early 1942. After a successful retreat and a few limited offensives up until the Spring of 1943, the allied army was unable to reconquer Burma. But after successful training and the availability of a much larger army, the allied army planned for the reconquest of Burma beginning in Fall of 1943.

In the coastal country of Arakan there were basically three sectors. The central sector comprising the general area Maungdaw- Buthidaung, and the Kalapanzin and Kaladan sectors serving basically as flanks to the central sector. It was in the Arakan that operations to reconquer Burma began. It was the 'soft under belly' of the entire Burma campaign.

Arakan was of great importance to the Japanese, as well as the allied army. For the Japanese, it was a land base from which they could dominate the port of Chittagong, as well as

gain the dual advantage of a river line of communication. For their general operations in Burma, which included an advance into Delhi, India, they used Arakan to tie up allied forces and thus loosen their concentration on the central front, especially Imphal and Kohima. But it was not good bait because the allies at this time were able to employ an overwhelming force. Above all, however, Arakan was of importance because the Japanese had a military base in the town of Akyab. For the allied army this base was the first attraction. An attack on it might lure the Japanese air force to come out and fight. Furthermore, for the reconquest of Burma to be deemed complete, the port city of Rangoon had to be invested. Arakan was the closest land base from which an amphibious operation could be mounted. It was also important in the event of a landward advance to Rangoon. It would serve as a flank to the units operating on the central front of Burma. Control of the Arakan would help the air force because they would then be within the two hundred and fifty-mile economic range of the supply aircraft. Finally, located near the river, it was an important line of communication.

So, in the Arakan, the initial allied objective was the capture of Akyab. The planned amphibious operation was cancelled due to logistical difficulties. A landward advance was now imperative. But during the limited offensives in the Spring of 1942-43, the Japanese reaction to the allied

landward attempt to secure Maungdaw-Buthidaung was to threaten the British communications by advancing a force up the Kaladan valley. During that operation, the Japanese infiltrated into the Kaladan from the central plain of Burma through the Arakan Yoma. To counter these moves, therefore, XV Corps, in control of the Arakan operations, detailed the 81st Division to the Kaladan as a flank guard and to threaten Japanese east to west communications.¹

In November of 1943, the allied army in Arakan was in contact with enemy troops on all sectors. In the planned offensive the initial objective was to secure the general line Maungdaw-Buthidaung, positions from which it would be possible to capture Akyab.² The Maungdaw-Buthidaung line was an intrinsic part of allied operations not because of its proximity to the river nor the landward advance option it afforded, but because it was rare terrain where road communication was not separated by chaungs or hills. Wherever such terrain could be found, especially in the Arakan, it was a very valuable piece of real estate.

The 81st Division arrived in India in August and September of 1943. In November they moved to Chiringa in Arakan by way of Chittagong and by sea through Calcutta. The 81st Division in Burma was comprised of 3, 5 and 6 (W.A.) Infantry brigades. But for the Arakan operations only 5 and 6

brigades were employed because 3 (W.A.) Infantry brigade, comprising 6, 7 and 12 Nigerian Regiments, was attached to Gen. Wingate's Long Range Penetration Force.³ 5 Infantry brigade was made up of 5, 7 and 8 Gold Coast Regiments and 3 Auxiliary Group (carriers). 6 Infantry brigade comprised 4 Nigerian Regiment, 1 Sierra Leone, 1 Gold Coast Regiments and 4 Auxiliary Group. With reinforcements and casualties going back and forth, the two brigades and other divisional troops averaged twelve thousand officers and other ranks. They were equipped with the Lee-Enfield Mark I.303 in. rifles, Sten Mark II submachine gun, 3-inch mortars, anti-tank rifles, and 3.7-inch howitzers. The anti-aircraft units were armed with L.M.G.s. There were also discharger cups and grenades for the troops.*

The 81st Division detailed to the Kaladan in the Fall of 1943 was a depleted force. As stated, a third of the Division, 3 (W.A.) brigade was hived-off to serve with Wingate's Long Range Penetration Force. Furthermore, the 81st (W.A.) Reconnaissance Regiment was detailed to serve on the central Arakan front until December of 1944, when they reverted to the division. Comprising A, B and C squadrons, the 81st reconnaissance regiment was an amalgam of Nigerian and Gold Coast units. They disembarked at Chiringa on the

* See Appendix One for the remainder of the division troops.

26th of December 1943 and immediately came under command of XV Corps. On the central sector of the Arakan front, before rejoining the rest of the division, they engaged in a series of operations including amphibious raids along the coast, and patrolling.

In December of 1943, as part of XV Corps they took over the defence of the Teknaf Peninsula. Attached to the 9th Indian brigade of the 5th (Indian) Division, they dominated the coastal flank of the division which was expected to lead in the attack in the Naf-Maungdaw-Buthidaung tunnels area. In their operations along the coast they were the first to identify the Japanese 144th Regiment and also captured enemy documents detailing their impending attack on the central sector. They also provided protection in the Razabil area by foot and mounted-patrols. Finally, the 81st Reconnaissance Regiment also served with the 26th (Indian) Division in March and April, protecting its flanks at Taung Bazaar.⁴

Arakan is lacerated by hills. Two ranges are located in the Mayu Peninsula and another between the Rivers Kalapanzin and Kaladan. The hills rise to a sharp ridge and drop steeply on the other side. The vegetation on the slopes is bamboo and drops into ordinary jungle in the lower extremities. The Kaladan, among other things, was an important sector because the main rivers, the Kalapanzin and Kaladan with their

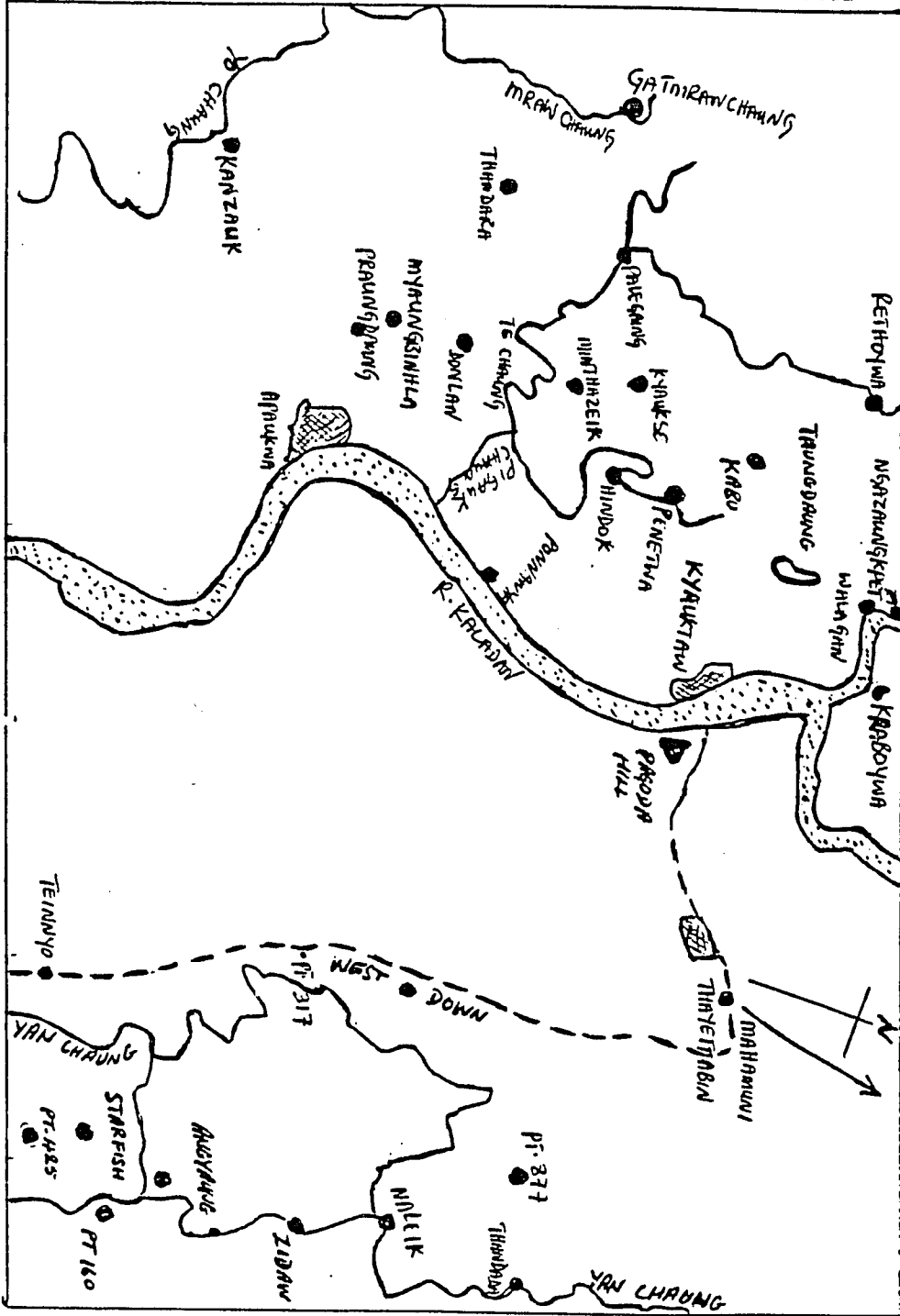
tributaries converge on Akyab, the location of the Japanese base.

The 81st Division's advance down the Kaladan was to capture Kyauktaw with the ultimate objective of cutting the Kanzauk-Htizwe road, which was the enemy's main parallel line of communication between the Kaladan and the Kalapanzin valleys. In carrying out this objective, they were expected to contain or destroy the Japanese force in the Kaladan so they would not be able to influence operations on the central Arakan sector. In any event, the detailing of the division to the Kaladan brought up the major issue confronting the allies, the transportation of supplies to the troops over rough terrain. As described earlier, the solution was air supply. It was estimated that the division would need about fifty-one thousand pounds of supply per day, including ammunition, which would require about twenty-two aircraft with about twelve in reserve. It was the first non-special force formation to be solely maintained by air in Burma.⁵ However, before air supply could be carried out, the division had to reach the valley overland. As a result, a jeep track about seventy-five miles long was constructed from Chiringa to Daletme. The West African Way, as it was known, was constructed by the 5 and 6 Field Companies of the division.⁶ Construction of the West African Way began on the 18th of November, 1943, and was finished on the 17th of January,

1944. It ran through four ranges of high and steep hills. It was a fine work of engineering, considering that modern equipment for construction was not available. The troops had to use mostly machetes, pikes and shovels.⁷ Moreover, the construction was done right after the monsoon, and the lingering inhospitalities attendant upon it, such as slippery and muddy roads, overflowing chaungs and high incidence of malaria.

The West African Way was of immense strategic importance. It was a route for entrance into the Kaladan and in the event of a disaster it could serve as an exit track. Although plans for air supply had been made, it was still conjectural. It had not yet shown it could work. Thus the West African Way could serve also as a back-up supply route. Furthermore, the Kaladan villages were still not fully explored and the construction of the Way was a good way of further studying the area with regard to terrain, vegetation and the people. Finally, and closely tied to this point, was the fact that some of the equipment, such as pack mules, could not be air dropped in an unexcavated jungle.

In the operation in Kaladan, the initial objective of the division was to hold the area Daletme-Satpaung-Mowdok with a view to a subsequent advance south.⁸ 6 brigade with 4 N.R. leading left Chiringa on December 7, 1943 and arrived Mowdok



PT= Point

81st (W.A.) DIVISION IN THE KALADAN

on the 18th, with Brigadier J.W.A. Hayes commanding. Forward units were dispatched to the vicinity of Daletme and Satpaung to establish base of operations. 5 brigade, due to logistical problems, followed later with Brigadier E.H.Collins commanding.

Apart from the divisional troops, each of the six regiments of the two brigades consisted of a headquarters, a headquarters company, intercommunication platoon, mortar platoon, anti-aircraft platoon, administrative platoon and four rifle companies. There was also the auxiliary group (gun carriers) trained as an integral part of the units they served.

For the advance into the Kaladan and to their objectives, Maj. Gen. C.G. Woolner had planned to reach Kyauktaw with the whole division by the 15th of January 1944. To carry out this objective, Woolner had thought that he would advance south on Kyauktaw. This plan would ensure work on the track from Amtoli eastwards. However, the difficulty with it opened up the possibility of the isolation of units of the 6 (W.A.) brigade which would lead the division into the Kaladan. Woolners' other option would have been to move some of the units of 6 brigade as soon as the jeep track was fully operational to the Mowdok area with the task of working on the eastern end of the track. Or to move one or more

battalions of 5 brigade as soon as they arrived to work on the track eastwards from Amtoli. And then, when all of 5 brigade group completed its concentration at Chiringa, to move it and the divisional headquarters up to the area Satpaung-Mowdok for the subsequent advance on Kyauktaw.⁹ This second option, which Woolner later adopted, allowed work on the track to continue, and a much firmer base was established because the whole of the 6 brigade was within supporting distance of the forward battalion. The advantage of this eclectic plan was that the two brigades did not have to rely on one source for supplies.

Indeed the question of supply was pivotal. 6 brigade was to be supplied from Mowdok and the battalions of 5 brigade from Alikadam. But the idea of using non-engineering units to work on the track and advancing offensively at the same time was good division of labor but unsound military administration. It was a dangerous gamble because it might distract the brigades' attention from their main objective. Furthermore, the term "supporting distance" between various units needs qualification. In the Arakan, more so in the Kaladan, a one mile distance between supporting units was often much farther because it might entail the surmounting of steeps and ridges. Finally, the task of supplying supporting units from different supply dumps constantly replenished by air might prove to be dangerous. Any delay in the supply of one unit

could cause delay in supporting another and would ultimately result in disaster. Thus, the plan adopted was essentially the dispersion of two brigades and it lent itself to infiltration, at which the enemy was adept. What was good about this plan, however, was that it allowed taking advantage of air supply because new supply dumps might then be created at any time in the event of an emergency. But even then, since the plan of fighting in 'boxes' had already been developed by allied command, there was no reason why the division should disperse her forces. They should have advanced and supplied in box formation, thus not concerning themselves so much about Mowdok and Alikadam dumps and the attendant problems of securing the supply lines from the bases to the forward positions.

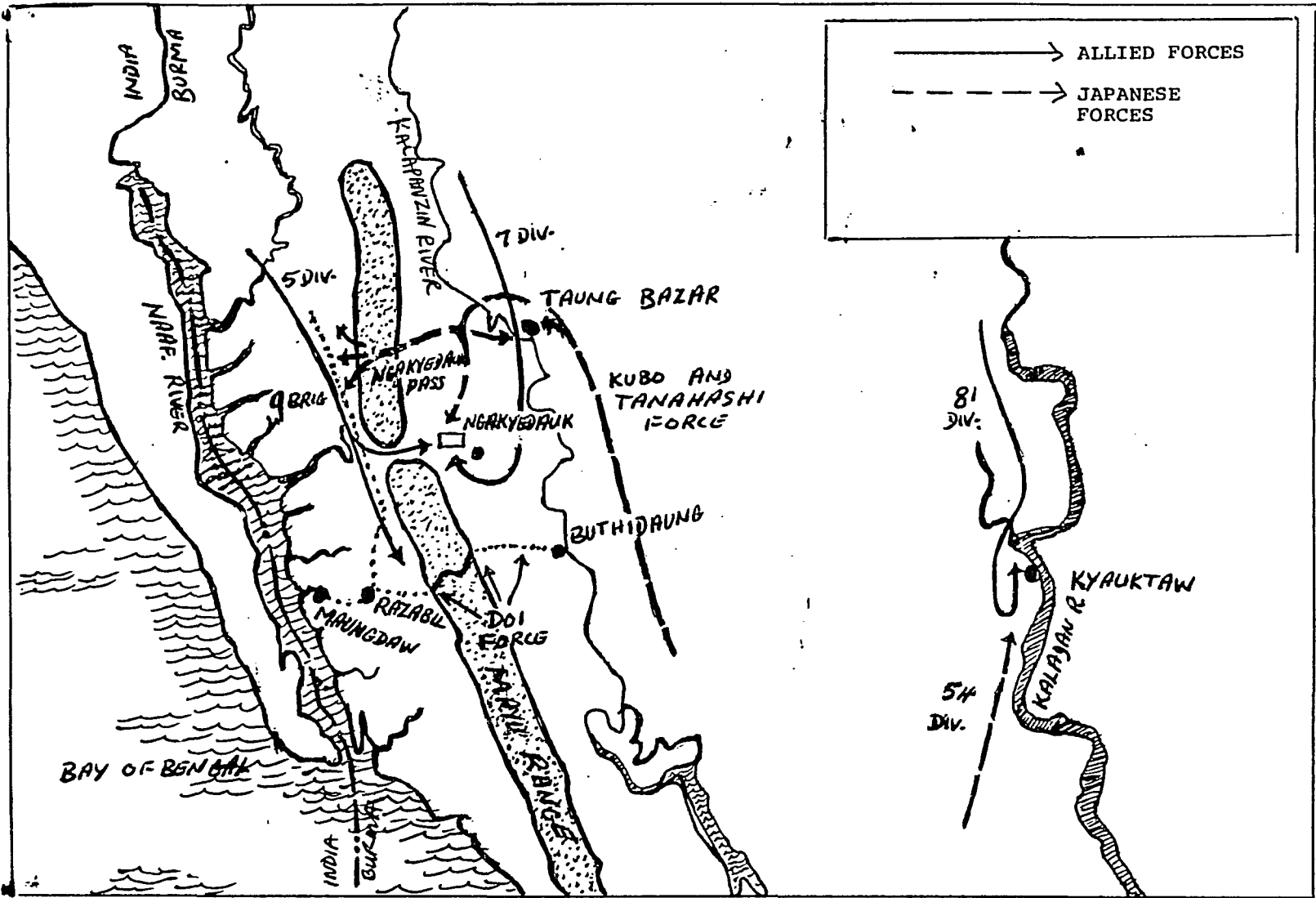
Nonetheless, Woolner appreciated, on the other hand, that the enemy might move rapidly to Mowdok with his whole Kaladan force, seize it, and delay the entire plan. It was a bold and good plan but apart from possessing the Mowdok dump, he would have a very long line of communication. Perhaps, the Japanese might just decide to hold a force at Kyauktaw and await the 81st division's attack. This, Woolner argued, would leave the initiative to the 81st and would not distract preparations to the north. It would be too good to be true. It was more likely, he concluded, that the enemy would hold Kyauktaw strongly and push forward to Mowdok-Daletme and send a small

force to capture Mowdok. This would delay and harass the 81st division advance and preparation. This plan, he continued, offered the Japanese a firm base, did not surrender the initiative, and gave them the double advantage of supplying from the Mowdok dump and falling back on Kyauktaw. In all, the important aspect of Woolners' appreciation of the enemies course of action is the tacit realization that a small force with good fire-power can infiltrate a much larger force. But his course of action, the juggling of forces for different objectives, the lack of battle experience, the unfamiliarity of the terrain would later lead the division to a major set-back.

Up till now the strength of the Japanese force in the Kaladan was not fully known, but believed to be a little more than two brigades of about seven to ten thousand troops.¹⁰ Apart from the difficulties of intelligence gathering in the Kaladan, estimation of enemy strength was difficult for two reasons. One was inclusion of some native Burmese and Indian nationals as part of the enemy and the other was the nature of Japanese formations. Overall, the 54th Infantry and 55th Infantry (previously mounted Cavalry) Divisions served on the Arakan front. But in the Kaladan operations it was mostly units of the 55th division that were encountered. For operations such as those in Arakan they used independent infantry brigades, independent mixed brigades, independent

mixed regiments, and mixed infantry groups. Their independent infantry brigade consisted of four infantry battalions and one signal unit and was used to garrison occupied areas. In the latter part of the war they were used for combat. The independent mixed brigade was made up of three to six infantry battalions, one artillery unit, and one engineer unit. This unit was used for general combat purposes. Independent mixed regiments contained three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion and one engineer company. It was used in the defence of an island or an isolated post. Finally, the mixed infantry group had an infantry headquarters of a division, three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion and one engineer company. This unit was usually organized for a specific mission or operation. Thus to accurately identify a unit it was necessary to fully identify if it were mixed or an independent brigade or regiment or a mixed infantry group. It was not easy.

The problem in the Kaladan was not just the size and strength of the armies going at each other, but terrain. The hills and jungles of Kaladan, as elsewhere in Burma, made it possible that your front, flank or rear were possible fronts at all times. In twentieth-century warfare, strength is important but not crucial because heavy ordnance and high caliber weapons have made it possible for a smaller sized force to tactically defeat, or destroy, a larger force. The



THE SECOND ARAKAN CAMPAIGN

Japanese army's concern was to dominate the Kaladan so as to influence the operations on the central sector, and not primarily to destroy the 81st division. In the Kaladan, and across the Arakan Yoma, they also wanted to serve as a possible threat to operations on the central front of Burma. From the Kaladan the Japanese wanted to be able to maintain communication with units on the Kalapanzin sector. Finally, they hoped to use the Kaladan operations to tie down allied forces and prevent them from consolidating their forces.

In any event, the move towards the Kaladan was led by 4 Nigerian regiment of the 6(W.A.) brigade. It started on January 18th, three days behind schedule.¹¹ The delay was due mainly to the elements and logistics. The construction of the West African Way, heavy rains and the loss of some communication equipments at sea all contributed to the delay. Initially, they travelled light because of the late arrival of their auxiliary group. The remaining units of the brigade and 5(W.A.) brigade followed soon after and some of the troops were used to work on the West African Way still under construction. But the movement of the leading troops of 6 brigade was slow because of communication problems between 4 Nigerian Regiment and the Brigade Headquarters stationed at Mowdok.¹² The communication difficulty was because the brigades signal section lost twenty-two of their radio sets when the ship carrying their stores caught fire and was

scuttled at Calcutta docks.¹³

Despite that, XV Corps on 4th January instructed the 81st Division to advance from Daletme not later than 21st January to capture Kyauktaw, and cut the enemy's main line of communication between the Kalapanzin and the Kaladan valleys and the Htizwe-Kanzauk road. However, XV Corps advised that prepared Japanese positions were not to be assaulted without softening of the position by air strikes, which the corps headquarters would provide.¹⁴ But even with tactical air support there was not enough fire-power in the understrength division. The division was without the 81st reconnaissance regiment and the artillery consisted of one light regiment armed with 3.7-inch howitzers- an accurate weapon with a maximum range of six thousand yards- carried by jeeps and 15 cwt trucks. There was also a three inch mortar battery.¹⁵ No tanks were allotted to the division because they could not be used effectively in the Kaladan. The lack of effective fire-power was further exacerbated by the loss of some of the division's guns and workshops at sea.

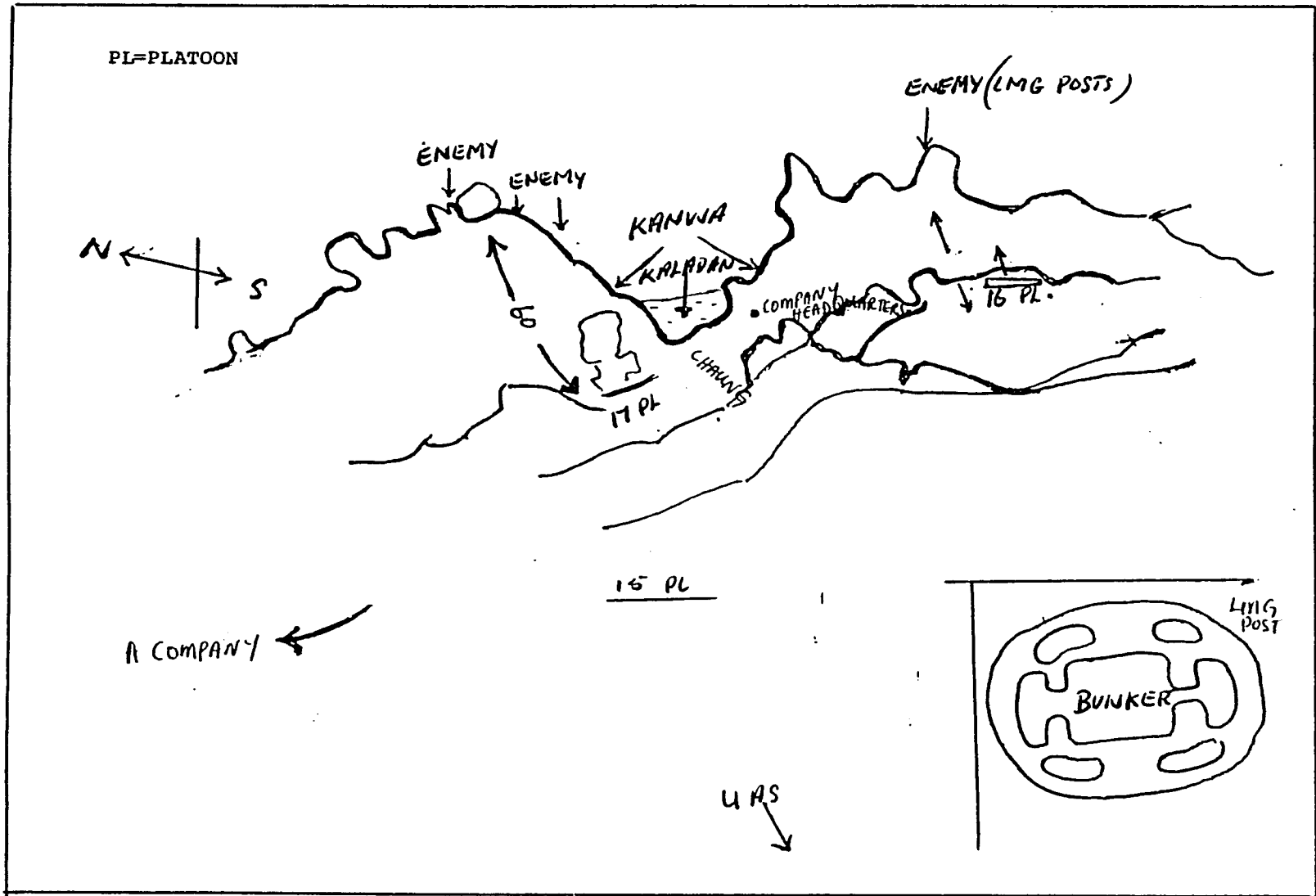
The Daisy Moller, an unescorted ship carrying fifty-four Bofors guns and various workshops of the 81st division was sunk at sea by the enemy. There were insufficient escorts

to allow escort for an individual ship, and it could not be included in a convoy because of its slow speed. Finally, there had been no information it was carrying goods of special military importance.¹⁶ The situation was ameliorated by the intercession of the Supreme Allied Commander during a visit to the division. As a result, twenty four Bofors guns were sent from Jubbulpore.¹⁷ Further, to compensate for the lack of firepower, the Divisional Commander, Woolner, ordered that Japanese positions should be encircled, thus forcing the enemy to break-out. To help reduce the impact of the depleted strength of the division and the lack of a reconnaissance regiment, 11(E.A.) Scout Battalion was attached to the division.¹⁸

On 18th January, with 6 brigade in the lead, the division began to leave the Daletme area, moving on Kanwa, south of Paletwa. All troops were to be in Kanwa before further advance would be made, as the commander was cautious about dividing his force.

In the Kaladan, the Japanese consisted of the 1st battalion of the 213th Regiment based on Kyauktaw. But there were other units spread out around Panwa and Mangkhol. In addition, about a battalion of the Burma National Army made up of Burmese supporting the Japanese forces, was believed to be

about twelve miles south of Daletme, at Murgai and Tringhat. On 20th January, 4 Nigerian Regiment met opposition at Pansanwa and 1 Gambia Regiment at Murgai. In the ensuing operations 1/213 Regiment of the Japanese army was identified and two Japanese soldiers were captured. On the Pansanwa operations, B and D company of 4 N.R., with the task of clearing and destroying the enemy in the 'Pansanwa-Kyile-Kiilewa' area, did not meet any concerted opposition. However, the enemy believed to be about fifteen Japanese and approximately twenty Burma Traitor Army (B.T.A.) sniped and fired at intervals. But in the end, on the 20th of January, 4 N.R. had captured three Bren guns, eleven British rifles, two Japanese rifles, one grenade thrower and several grenades, a spare barrel of one Type 96 Japanese L.M.G., twenty Japanese respirators, several maps, papers and badges of rank. Against two African Other Ranks (A.O.R.) wounded, five Japanese and six B.T.A. were killed.¹⁹ Since the Japanese army reveled in fighting to the last man, the Pansanwa and Murgai operations was a morale booster, a great achievement for the 81st division. It was later understood that they surrendered because they believed Africans ate those killed in battle and that if eaten they " would not be acceptable to their ancestors hereafter".²⁰ On the 22 January Milawa-Sepalaung was reached and on the 24th of January Paletwa was invested. From Paletwa, an attack was planned on the Japanese base at Kanwa.



D COMPANY, 4 NIGERIAN REGIMENT AT KANWA, 25th JANUARY 1944

The Japanese at Kanwa were dug-in in two mutually supporting works on two small hills. To dislodge a Japanese unit from their bunkers was not an easy task. Each bunker held about five to ten men armed with medium and light machine guns. They were mutually supporting, and to assault one bunker was to be fired at by others. They were constructed in such a way that even a direct hit by field guns or medium bombs rarely penetrated. The Japanese bunker was "made usually of heavy logs covered with four or five feet of earth, and so camouflaged in the jungle that it could not be picked out at even fifty yards without prolonged searching."21 However, as planned, 4 Nigerian Regiment was ordered to surround the positions and assault them on two sides, from the north-west and south. The regiment was supported by 3 Light Battery and the mortars of 1 Sierra Leone Regiment and 1 Gambia Regiment, who were to fire from the east bank of the river, which offered good observation. The remaining units of 1 Sierra-Leone Regiment, about one mile away, were detailed to protect the left flank and 1 Gambia Regiment was put in divisional reserve. A and D Companies of 4 N.R. bore the brunt of the operations.

On the night of January 24th/25th, A Company of 4 N.R. moved down the west bank of river Kaladan from Paletwa and attacked enemy positions from the north. With 2 Section Mortars, a Detached Field Company and C Company of 1 Gambia

Regiment under command, A Company set out on its task. But due to the battle raging in the south, A Company was unable to use its mortars so as not to inflict casualties on the units operating in the south. However, at about 1745hrs, on the 25th of January, mortar fire was put down on suspected enemy positions. Initially it was accurate. In time it shifted and killed one European Officer and two A.O.Rs. It was demoralizing, and without mortar support, A Company could not launch an assault. Patrols sent out on the 26th to enemy positions on the track Paletwa-Kanwa and as far south as Laungkadu had seen no enemy. Meanwhile, C Company assaulted and captured positions south of the village and Kanwa itself. B Company was held in reserve and was used in stopping enemy reinforcements from coming up the Kaladan. For D Company it was a fierce and close fire fight in bamboo terrain. It flung a hook and attacked objectives west of the village, took one objective in the hills but could not take the other.

Marching down, towards the Kanwa chaung, there was a conical hill to the left. On the 25th, 16 Platoon (pl.) was ordered move right of the hill and advance north-north-east and secure the track on the right. 17 Platoon was to go left, cross the hill and secure the track. 15 Platoon was in the rear and in reserve. 16 Platoon advance went undisturbed but 17 advanced only 60 yards before being showered with grenade, rifle and L.M.G. fire. The Platoon

replied indecisively and had to withdraw. A second attempt was made with one Platoon of A Company under command. 16 Platoon attacked the enemy rear left from the north, while 17 Platoon and A Company Platoon flanked further left of the previous attack. But again 17 Platoon came under attack from another position below the hill and east of the previous position. The attack was again called off temporarily. A third plan was made this time to use 15 Platoon formerly in reserve but it was never consummated because D Company was ordered to A Company's position.

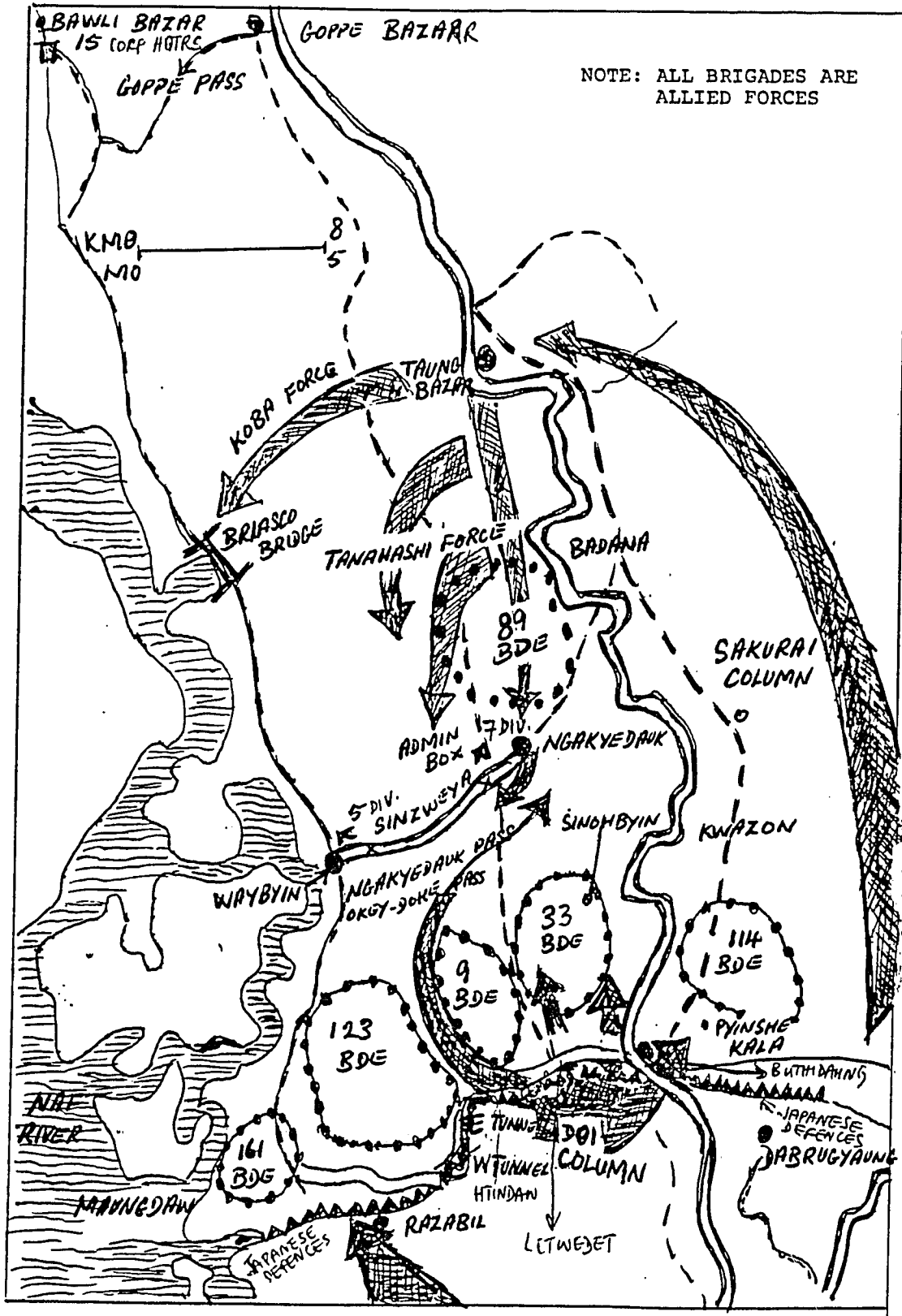
In the course of the entire Kanwa operations an air strike could not be made due to unavailability of aircraft. An air strike would have been difficult because of the defilation offered by the jungle, and the close nature of the combat. All in all, the terrain and the attendant navigational problems of keeping touch and direction, plus the inability of the wireless sets to function effectively, resulted in the operation running into problems. Later in the morning of the 26th, however, patrols found the enemy had evacuated the position. Thus, the enemy was good at all round defence but had difficulty sustaining it. But due to his intelligence system and his fighting on the defensive it was difficult to surprise him. Moreover, his bunkers, thought to contain about twenty men, had the capacity for fifty to sixty. But his fire was prolific rather than well aimed and was directed at the

officers. Hence, to defeat such opposition, the enemy positions had to be pin-pointed so as to make effective use of mortar and artillery fire.²² It is important to note that it was only after this battle, on 30th January, that the East African Scout battalion actually joined the division.

Thereafter, patrols and the advance continued according to plan. The 6 brigade was ordered to secure a Dakota strip at Medaung by moving astride the Kaladan. They were not to contest any opposition so as not to delay the advance east of the river. The next stop after Medaung was to be Thayettabin where a base was to be established. But before long the Japanese struck, launching Operation "C", or the "Ha Go" offensive, on February 4, 1944.²³

Operation "C" was a bold two-phase offensive by the Japanese army. Phase one in the Arakan called for the seizing of the port of Chittagong, and to draw allied forces into the Arakan and pin them down. Then, phase two would commence. Phase two would include the capture of Imphal and Dimapur, maintenance of pressure on North-East India and cutting the Assam line of communication, and ultimately a march on Delhi and assertion of political control by installation of a puppet government.²⁴

For the Arakan phase, 55 Japanese division was reorganized



OPERATION "C", FEBRUARY 1944

and with the Indian National Army, they were divided into three task forces. As the Supreme Commander's report asserts, "The leading Task Force (Tanahashi Force) of four battalions whose backbone was 112 Japanese Regiment, was to carry out the main encirclement. Its orders were to move up between the eastern flank of 7 Indian Division and the western flank of 81 West African Division, take Taung Bazaar from the rear, sweep around it, and cut the Ngakyedauk Pass, trapping 7 Indian Division on the eastern side of the Mayu Range. Kubo Force which was of battalion strength, was to follow a parallel route as far as Goppe Bazaar, and then push over the Goppe Pass and down the western slope of the Mayu Range. The Japanese hoped to cut the communications of the whole of 15 Corps by cutting the coastal road from the north at the village of Maunghnama. Doi Force, a group of about two battalions, would meanwhile attack from the Maungdaw-Buthidaung line".²⁵ The result of this plan was the Battle of "Ngakyedauk Pass", otherwise known as the Battle of the "Administrative Box".

On the morning of February 4, 1944, Tanahashi and Kubo force maneuvered through the eastern flank of 7 Indian Division, escaping air reconnaissance, to capture Taung Bazaar. Doi force began making frontal assaults on 7 Indian division north and north-west of Buthidaung. Tanahashi turned south to cut the Ngakyedauk Pass while Kubo force flanked

west to cut the Bawli Bazaar-Razabil road. On 6th February, an attempt was made to stop the outflanking forces. It was unsuccessful and the divisional headquarters of 7th division was overrun. The divisional commander, Maj. Gen. (later Lt. Gen.) Frank Messervy managed to re-establish his headquarters in the evening in the XV Corps Administrative Box, at Sinzweya. At his disposal were the three brigades of his division, one brigade of 5 Indian Division, and other mixed elements. On the 10th of February, Tanahashi force cut Ngakyedauk Pass and made contact with Doi Force. The Administrative Box was now totally encircled. Kubo force advanced north towards Goppe Pass. They were intercepted by the 26 Indian Division recalled from Fourteenth Army reserve in Comilla. The Japanese stormed the range between Goppe and Ngakyedauk but did not succeed in cutting 5 Indian Division communication with the north. Meanwhile air supply was becoming difficult because all three divisions had to be supplied by air. The Japanese air effort intensified. It was the Tojo against the Spitfires, for which the Hurricanes gave cover during re-fuelling. In the thirteen days of the operation, the Japanese lost sixty-five aircrafts against three Spitfires. It made the difference in this operation. Air superiority on the battlefield kept the three allied divisions fighting and denied the Japanese their much needed supplies. Thus after ten days -the length of time a Japanese soldiers' supplies lasted- the operation lost energy.

It was an allied victory because the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions were not destroyed. Essentially, the Japanese plan worked out as planned but they failed for three reasons. The first was the allied tactics of fighting in a box formation when encircled. The second was the massive air supply of units in the jungles. Thirdly, was the fact that the Japanese army was not equipped and trained to sustain a long drawn out offensive. Their line of communication was land based, and they were usually given supplies for approximately ten days.²⁶ In all, the offensive lost its steam by the end of February. On 5 March, XV Corps was ready to continue its offensive.

Meanwhile, in the Kaladan, 81st Division was operating and containing elements of the 55th Japanese Division. 1 Sierra Leone Regiment advanced on Medaung from Tinma East where the enemy was located on the forward slopes of Khabaw ridge. C Company moved west to attack the enemy's right flank, B and D Companies moved left south of Khabaw village. A Company was in reserve protecting bivouack positions, non fighting personnel and the rest of the battalion. On February 11, 1400hrs, C Company under cover of smoke in crossing open paddyland drove the enemy into Khabaw village inflicting three casualties and the usual booty of Japanese maps and documents, against the loss of one European N.C.O., one A.O.Rs., one A.O.Rs. missing in action and three A.O.Rs.

wounded. The operations lasted for about one hour and thereafter they went into reserve. B and D Companies assaulted the village from south and north, respectively. On the 12th of February, the enemy withdrew. There were believed to be about fifty to sixty Japanese. The advance continued from Minhla towards Medaung. A large number of enemy soldiers attacked D Company not realizing the rest of the battalion was within supporting distance. C Company made a frontal assault on the slopes of feature 232, 1 Platoon of B Company did the same on feature 201, while the rest of B Company, with light and heavy machine guns, assaulted enemy entrenched positions. The enemy held their own. At about 1900hrs, after a brief lull, B Company made a bayonet charge and the operation turned into a rout.²⁷ As usual, booty was collected, Shwebye was occupied, enabling work to commence on an air strip which was completed on the 21st of February.

But the situation soon came to a head, and it was time for the division to face one of its stiffest tests, Pagoda hill. The capture of Pagoda hill was a success marked by skillful maneuvering and gallantry. The loss was as a result of poor command decisions and not the ineptitude or lack of training of the individual soldier.

Moving from north to south in the Kaladan, the valley broadens and expands to about fifteen miles wide around

Kyauktaw. Opposite Kyauktaw is the cone shaped Pagoda Hill. It was an important position, because it offered good observation over a wide area which is rare in the jungle, especially the Kaladan. To hold Pagoda Hill was to hold Kyauktaw. On February 17, 1944, the Scout Battalion under the command of 6 brigade occupied Pagoda Hill. Two days later, 4 Nigerian Regiment, patrolling the road running south from Thayetabin, found no signs of the enemy. As a result, they took over Pagoda Hill. The fact that there were no direct combat operations during the occupation of the hill does not bespeak an easy victory. Indeed, since Kyauktaw was an important objective for the contending armies, it was due to good generalship and excellent execution that a fight did not take place. Thus, it would be fair to conclude that the entire operation from the Daletme-Satpaung-Mowdok area including the Kanwa operations was all part of the Pagoda hill success. What had happened to the enemy was clear. The 81st advance was rapid and caught them by surprise. The manner of advance by the 81st, which entailed the dispersion of forces, lured the Japanese into concentrating on the various units and not securing positions or territory. Temporarily, at least, this made sense for the Japanese army. But lacking air superiority, why go for territorial objectives and risk having a long line of communication? But realizing that Pagoda hill was a prized position, and that to hold it was to hold Kyauktaw, they went after it.

Meanwhile the Scout Battalion moved to Mahamuni to protect the left flank of 4 Nigerian Regiment. 1 Sierra Leone Regiment was at Shwebye, protecting the airstrips. 1 Gambia Regiment was faced with stiff opposition while trying to establish a bridge-head across the PiChaung, around its confluence with the Kaladan. This was necessary because it would surprise the Japanese and relieve 5 Brigade, which was being held up by the Japanese. The crossing of the Pi Chaung began on the 20th of February. But due to lack of assault boats it was not completed till the 22nd of February. C Company tried to cross in the area of Praing Chaung to form a bridgehead for the rest of the Regiment. But it met with well sited opposition and lost two boats. At about 0300hrs the next day they tried and were successful. But they soon lost communications with the rest of the Regiment. The assault boats were returned for B, D and A Company's who did not have any problems crossing the Pi Chaung and securing Kyauktaw. But their somewhat uneventful crossing owe much to C Company that had proceeded to distract and destroy the enemy around Walagan.²⁸ Nonetheless, Corps headquarters on learning of the occupation of Pagoda Hill emphasized that it be firmly held. In this connection, therefore, the divisional commander requested a machine gun company to help hold it. His request was not acceded to. It would cost the division later. He also asked for the 81st Reconnaissance Regiment. At Medaung, on February 24, 1944, during a visit to the division, the Corp

commander discussed some of these requests and his plans for the future.²⁹

On the 26th, XV Corp notified the division that the offensive on the main Arakan front was about to commence. But the information carried the warning that since the Kaladan force had become a serious threat, the Japanese might direct their main effort toward the division. They might re-inforce the division from Akyab, believed to be garrisoned by elements of 111th Regiment of the Japanese 54 Division. Another possibility was that the Japanese might try to hold the Kaladan force at the Kanzauk Pass and strike east of Kyauktaw. In all, therefore, they might be able to throw-in about five battalions against the Kaladan force.³⁰

Thus, XV Corps instructed the division to protect the left flank of the Corps, and contain and destroy as many Japanese units as possible; and, secondly, prevent the enemy from controlling Kyauktaw or the general line Kanzauk-Teinnyo; and finally, to try to keep the Japanese guessing as to the objective, whether Minbya, Akyab or Rathedaung. However, the main effort was to be directed west of the Mayu River to cut his line of communications on the Akyab-Buthidaung axis.³¹

The denial of Kyauktaw to the Japanese being the ultimate goal, the divisional commander reviewed all the

possibilities. In the first place he could leave one brigade group in the Kyauktaw-Mahamuni-Teinnyo area and move west from Apaukwa on to Kanzauk-Htizwe with the other brigade. This plan was certain to deny the Japanese Kyauktaw. But it would dangerously divide the units of the division. In itself, it did not guarantee success against the estimated enemy two battalions. It also constituted a westward movement.

Another option was to leave one battalion at Kyauktaw (Pagoda Hill) and move westwards with the remainder of the division. This would relegate the Pagoda Hill battalion to a defensive role. However, one of the battalions being considered for this test was the East African Scout Battalion which was not trained for a defensive role. Moreover the battalion detailed to do the defensive job would have to have sufficient firepower, which the division did not have. Afterwards, the rest of the brigade would have to be brought back from the main effort to prevent the enemy from proceeding straight up the Kaladan through Mahamuni. But the absence of one battalion would lessen the chances of success on a westward move.

The third option was to leave only a screen east of the Kaladan to give early warning of any Japanese thrust

northwards from Myohaung and make a rapid thrust westwards toward Htizwe with the whole division, and if any threat developed, to then send back one brigade to cope with it and try to hold what have been gained to the west with the other brigade. This move would certainly help the main front but would also divide the division dangerously and it would not be possible for the one brigade to destroy the Japanese force, but only to hold it.

Finally, he appreciated that he might as well abandon any westward move towards Htizwe as soon as any threat developed northwards from Myohaung and turn back with the whole division. This gave him a chance of destroying the enemy east of the Kaladan and of keeping the division together. However, it might allow the enemy to achieve his objective, the removal of a threat to his east-west line of communication which was crucial to his forces on the Mayu Peninsula. Gen. Woolner adopted this plan because it made use of his temporary superiority, it made sure of the retention of Kyauktaw, and it gave the best opportunity to destroy the enemy force.

In adopting his plan, Gen. Woolner conjectured that the Japanese would likely fight a delaying action on the roads Kanzauk-Yezogyang to prevent cutting their lifeline on the Mayu and at the same time employ all available reserves to

outflank and destroy the 81st Division by moving from Akyab via Minbya and Myohaung to Kyauktaw. But Woolner argued that the Japanese would be susceptible to a breakthrough by units of the 81st from the Kaladan on the Mayu which might maul the two Japanese battalions protecting their main forces on that front. If the Japanese tried to outflank units of the 81st probing to the Mayu, it would take them about seven days to move a force to Thayettabin, in the rear of the 81st probing force, but it would not be very hard for the 81st Division to disengage and face the outflanking force. Indeed, the Japanese took this option because it offered them the chance of destroying the West African Division and regaining control of the Kaladan.

The other likely option for the Japanese would have been to use all their available resources to confront the 81st Division on the approaches to the Mayu from Kanzauk. This would not guarantee the destruction of the division, but nonetheless would leave the Japanese in control of the Kaladan River, an important communication route. It also ensured the safety of the Mayu, and with reserves from Southern Burma, via Myebon, it might achieve great success.³²

To implement his appreciation, Woolner, planned to move east-west on the Mahamuni-Myohaung road. The 11 Scout Battalion would patrol extensively to give the earliest

warning of any enemy advance. The next step would be to advance the rest of the division to make a thrust to Htizwe via Kanzauk. Thereafter, with a view to surrounding and destroying any Japanese force trying to establish itself at Kyauktaw, and with detailed plans to be worked out, move the whole division back to the Kyauktaw-Mahamuni line. In all, these operations would be limited to the hills west of Kanzauk and east of Mahamuni-Myohaung, and intense patrolling by all units was to be carried out to give early warning of enemy action.

All in all, the appreciation by the XV Corps and the Divisional Headquarters as to the enemy's intention and strength was good. But the two tasks allotted to the division drew them in opposite directions: the protection of the Kaladan XV Corps left flank on the Central Front as well as the containment and destruction of Japanese force in the Kaladan. It is not surprising, therefore, that the 81st Division commander had to juggle troops. But the Kaladan with its dense jungle and inhospitable climate, would strain the allied advantage of mobility to its limits. Moreover, in the jungle, with the natural defence it offered, and the lack of a defined frontline, the enemy could infiltrate any one unit and route it from an established position.

For the offensive in the Kaladan, the Japanese force led by

Colonel Koba had approximately six battalions, plus artillery. Some of the units were: Headquarters, 111th Regiment; 55th Division Cavalry; 3/111th Regiment; one company 144th Regiment; a one thousand strong unit under Captain Honjo hived off from reinforcements for 144 Regiment; and finally one battalion of the Indian National Army.³⁴

The Japanese planned a two-front assault designed ultimately to destroy the 81st Division on the Kyauktaw plain. It was the only time the Japanese appeared in full force in the Kaladan. All other operations were relatively small scale, but spread over a large expanse of land. In the Japanese plan, Kobas' force was to demonstrate toward Pagoda Hill, cut the division's communications around Walagan, and then attack south. Simultaneously, Honjo's unit, with 55 Division Cavalry (unmounted), would advance north from Apaukwa. Only the demonstration stage of the Japanese plan worked out as planned. But the operations that resulted bared clearly the flaws in allied and 81st Division command plan of dividing one's forces in the large expanse of the Kaladan.

On 1st March, 1944, in an odd garrison job assignment, 11 (E.A.) Scout Battalion was suprised around Thayettabin. Exposed on Pagoda Hill, they were shelled relentlessly and thus took cover in the surrounding bush. Only 1 Gambia Regiment was sent to their aid and on the following day they

took over Pagoda Hill with the Scout Battalion and B Company of 1 Auxiliary Group under command. For the night of 2nd March, a counter-attack was planned. The Scout battalion was at the base of the hill, and after one Platoon of D Company was driven back to the main road area north of Pagoda Hill, 1 Platoon of B Company was ordered to the top of the hill as part of the counter-attack force. D Company was ordered to the area north of Pagoda Hill to hold off any enemy attack. But enemy fire was heavy and vigorous. At about 0700 hrs on 3rd March, Regiment Commander ordered C and D Companies to the northern end of the base area on Pagoda Hill. Battalion Headquarters, headquarter company and A Company were ordered to the south, to join B Company. But before this order could be fully put in place Pagoda Hill had fallen, and enemy fire was still heavy, although inaccurate. B Company was ordered to prepare a perimeter around its base while the rest of the Pagoda force withdrew along the Preingyaung Chaung. Fierce fighting followed, but as the enemy was moving south to cut off the retreating force, the commander decided to withdraw further south. It was here, about 1330hrs that the units got in touch with 1 Sierra Leone Regiment, the first knowledge of relief. Thereafter, the successful registration of air strikes and mortar fire ameliorated the situation.³⁵ The Japanese had not opened up their operation by a fire-fight. They infiltrated the positions of 1 Gambia Regiment, widely dispersed on Pagoda Hill and still trying to dig in, control

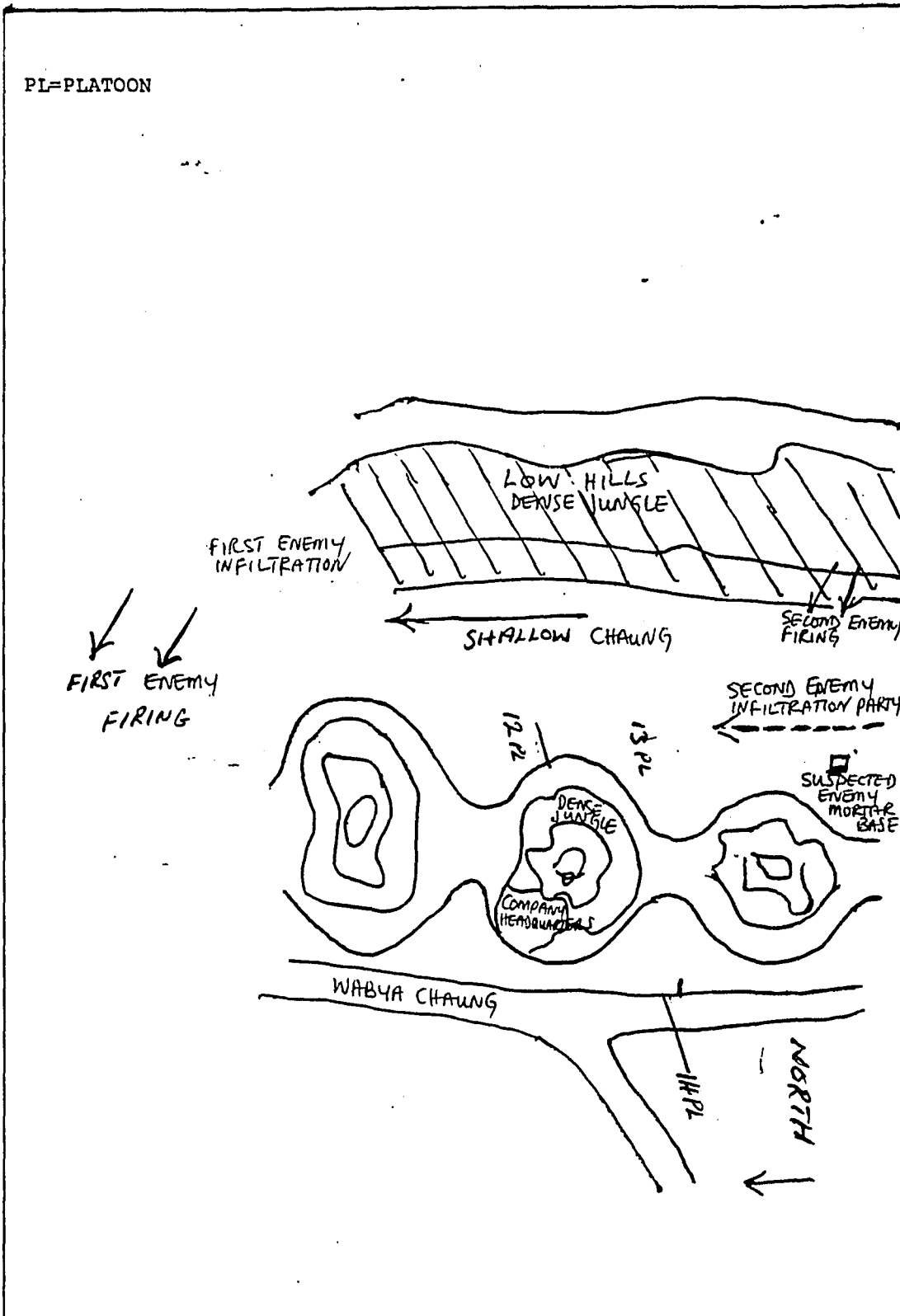
broke down, and before help could come, overwhelmed them. The surrounding force tried to cut off possible reinforcements for the Gambia Regiment. But the regiment was good enough to extricate itself.

The successful infiltration and routing of 1 Gambia Regiment was because of the lack of knowledge of the true strength of the force facing them, about three battalions. Moreover, 1 Gambia Regiment had previously been a patrolling force and had not had any experience in defensive operations. This failure to contain the Japanese can also be linked directly to the corp and divisional headquarters appreciation. First of all, the East African Scout Battalion was lightly armed and essentially a reconnaissance battalion and was not intended to defend an area of importance to allied operations. 1 Gambia Regiment was too small a unit to defend Pagoda Hill and the contiguous area. Above all, the lack of numerical superiority caused not only by the juggling of forces, but also by poor communication and coordination of reinforcement, was the principal cause of failure. The other units of the division were widely dispersed in the Kaladan and could not quickly come to the aid of 1 Gambia Regiment and the East African Scout Battalion. Thus when the Japanese force struck on 3rd March a spirited defence was made by the two 81st Division units but they were overwhelmed by numbers and by the determination of the Japanese.

Although Pagoda Hill was a strategic position, and was contested by 1 Gambia Regiment, casualties were few because the Japanese army, slow in advancing, did not bring to bear all five battalions earmarked for their Kyauktaw operations. Furthermore, as soon as 1 Gambia Regiment realized they were outnumbered and not sure of any reinforcement, they quickly withdrew.³⁶ When the news of the loss of Pagoda Hill got to the Divisional Headquarters the commander had to decide whether to contest Pagoda Hill, or withdraw. However, the allied force had a reprieve, as the Japanese did not follow up on their success because the rest of their forces did not arrive on time. Moreover, the 81st Division was not there in full force to be annihilated.

At this point, the choice was clear for Woolner. He might attempt to recapture Pagoda Hill with the troops in the contiguous area, but in the event of failure, he would have to contend with the strong possibility of having approximately one mile separate his units. Even if immediate recapture was opted for, the forces were so widely dispersed that only 1 Sierra Leone Regiment would be immediately available. If such a venture was undertaken, 6 Brigade commander was not confident of success because 4 Nigerian Regiment from Apaukwa would not be available until the 5th of March.³⁷ Faced with defeat, and without much help coming, he decided to withdraw before further damage was done. In most

PL=PLATOON



"C" COMPANY, 4 NIGERIAN REGIMENT, 17th MARCH, 1944

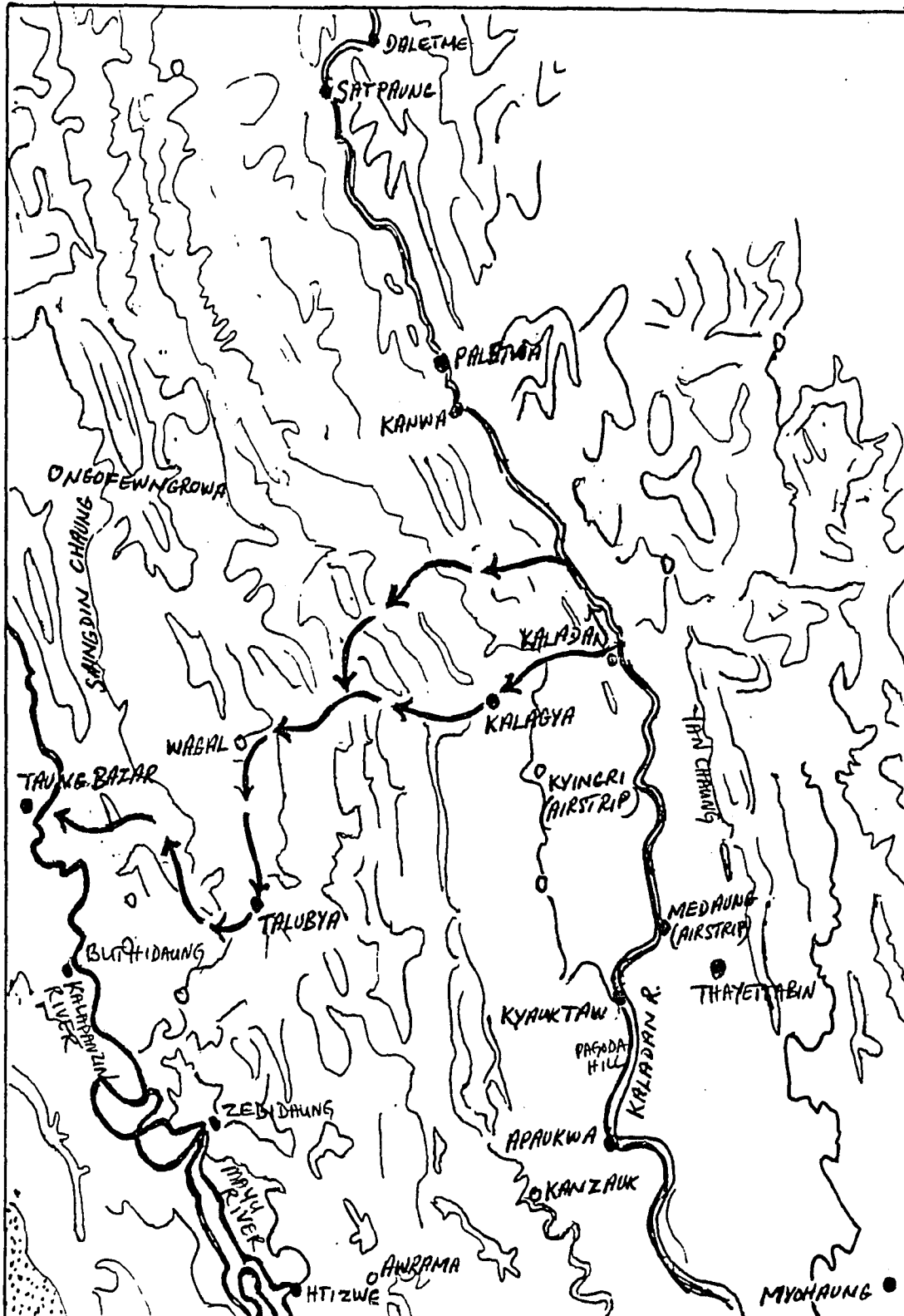
military operations the mishap of one unit can affect the morale of the others. For the 81st Division, used to constantly advancing, the withdrawal from Kyauktaw was a morale set-back. But added to this was the fact that the division had been in the Kaladan for approximately five months without rest. Loss of morale can lead to poor performance. Thus, prudence warranted that they be given some rest. Woolner thought so. But before the division could get their rest they engaged in two spirited operations in the Sebaseik area.

On March 4, two Japanese units infiltrated C Company of 4 N.R. positions in the Chaung area. Enemy action was successful and they secured feature B while C Company withdrew to Chaung Junction. Still under consistent fire they withdrew towards battalion headquarters where they reorganized and passed into reserve. One European Officer was wounded, three A.O.Rs. missing, two killed and five wounded. For the Japanese thirty-two were believed killed. Furthermore, on the 17th of March, D Company of 4 N.R. was attacked at Sebaseik. With the assistance of two platoons of C Company, D Company held on. But they did not counter-attack, the commander concluding that his instruction was to move to the hill feature in the Kyingri loop of the Pi Chaung area. Nevertheless, in this operation it was observed that the enemy fired their weapons in the sequence, mortar-

grenade-machine gun. It was also observed that they fired their machine guns at positions, and fired their L.M.Gs. into the trees while the attack went forward to the next position. There was shouting in between to try to discover enemy positions.³⁸

While making the decision to withdraw, Woolner appreciated correctly that a strong enemy force might be advancing up the Kaladan. The urgency of withdrawal was exacerbated by the precarious water supply situation. Casualties hampered mobility and dampened morale and had to be evacuated. The Kyauktaw set-back did not end military operations in the Kaladan. All around the villages in the Kaladan valley such as Htabaw, the Pi Chaung area and Kyingri, deep patrolling and minor operations continued until the 81st Division moved to the Kalapanziñ valley.

For the most part, apart from the setback at Kyauktaw, the first Kaladan campaign ended with no obvious victor. Containment was still the norm. In spite of the advantages of air supply and carriers in aiding mobility, the 81st Division could not pull off Kyauktaw due to poor command decisions. The Japanese relied throughout the campaign on interior lines of communication. But after eliminating the threat to their line of communication in the Kaladan they were now interested in reinforcing the units on the Mayu front. The



81 (W.A.) DIVISION ADVANCE FROM THE KALADAN TO THE KALAPANZIN

only reason they might reinforce the Kaladan would be if they intended to advance in strength northwards to pose a serious threat in the Chittagong area.

After a brief visit to the XV Corps Headquarters on 23rd March, 1944, the Divisional Commander learned of the planned move of the division to the Kalapanzin valley. On his return, he was met by Brigadier R.N. Cartwright, Commander 6 Brigade, who replaced Brigadier Hayes, evacuated sick. Previously, he was the commander of the 81st Reconnaissance Regiment operating on the main front.

It is not clear whether the move of the 81st Division to the Kalapanzin was designed to save a demoralized army or because of need for them in the Kalapanzin sector. Since the 81st continued minor military operations in the Kaladan even after the Pagoda Hill setback, the idea of removing them to the Kalapanzin to save a demoralized division does not seem plausible. After the loss of Pagoda Hill, military operations continued in the Kaladan. There were no instances of combat refusals or insubordination, nor any overt complaints on the part of the divisional command. This indicates that morale was unimpaired. Moreover, the Japanese force did not appear in strength anywhere in the Kaladan. While it is true that Pagoda Hill was lost, they had been successful in one of their objectives, containing the Japanese in the Kaladan.

The move to the Kalapanzin began on April 10, 1944. A small force, known as 'Hubforce' was left in the Kaladan for further operations.

After the Battle of Ngakyedauk Pass, when it was known that the 7 (Indian) Division would be leaving for the Central Front, the void created by their departure had to be filled. It was appreciated that the enemy might infiltrate east of the Kalapanzin River, south of Taung. The need to tie down, contain and possibly destroy them, in all likelihood, led to the detailing of the 81st to the Kalapanzin valley. It was also known to the allies that Japanese intentions were to reinforce units on the Mayu front through the Kalapanzin, since they had eliminated the threat to their line of communication. Reinforcing the Mayu front through the Kaladan was not likely because of their intentions of reinforcing Myohaung from the Kaladan.³⁹

On March 25, 1944 XV Corps Headquarters ordered the 81st Division to move to the Kalapanzin and estimated that the force facing them was about one thousand two-hundred strong, made up of elements of 55th Division cavalry. The order suggested the move be made on a porter basis designed to deceive the enemy that the division was moving southwards down the Kaladan. In the course of the movement, the order continued, major engagements should be avoided. Finally, this

move should be rapidly but carefully carried out so that entry into the Kalapanzin would be anywhere from 20th April on, but before the start of the monsoon. In the Kalapanzin the destruction of the enemy force would be the objective.⁴⁰ Perhaps a lesson had been learnt from the Kaladan operation, that it was dangerous to undertake too many objectives at the same time.

Meanwhile, in the Kaladan, 1 Gambia Regiment came under the command of 7/16 Punjabis, and they were both known as 'Hubforce.' On 13th April after intense movement by the Japanese and two days after the 81st Division left the Kaladan, 7/16 Punjabis moved to Naiwa and 1 Gambia Regiment was stationed at Paletwa. By 1st May the two units concentrated on the Labawa-Satpaung axis. The Japanese attacked the Labawa position with the intention of splitting the two units, and they moved back to the Mowdok area.

But the pressure being put on the two units began to cause some anxiety at the XV Corps. As a result, 6 Brigade was ordered to move from Taung to Chiringa, and from there secure all dumps and installations in the Mowdok area, establish communications to the Sangu River at Singpa and hold it until the monsoon was fully on, and if possible, drive the Japanese out of their Labawa positions. Then, once the monsoon started, withdraw to Bandarban and leave the Tripura Rifles

to hold the Mowdok area.⁴¹ It was a simple and straight-forward order. Although the rains were late in coming, Brig. Carthwright reached Mowdok June 5th, three days late due to unceasing rain. Before 6 Brigade arrived, the Japanese continued to attack on all fronts in the Kaladan because they were angling for good positions in readiness for the monsoon when active military operations would cease. But the offensives were also designed to disguise the withdrawal of some of their regiments. For instance, they attacked and captured Mowdok in order to cover the withdrawal of their 1/29th Regiment. When 6 Brigade finally arrived at Mowdok, the Japanese army lacked the strength of numbers to carry out offensives operations. 6 Brigade managed to secure Mowdok, establishing its positions just before the monsoon ensued in full force. In the end, the Japanese monsoon position was astride the Labawa-Mowdok road. For her actions in the Mowdok area, 1 Gambia Regiment was awarded the battle honor 'Mowdok.'

Meanwhile, the 81st Division units in the Kalapanzin valley sector relentlessly hunted the Japanese. They protected the XV Corp withdrawal from Buthidaung by holding the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road up to and including the Tunnels. The Japanese were dive bombed by day, raided in the occupied villages at night and their ammunition dumps were located and destroyed. Japanese lines of communication were harassed frequently,

especially between Kindaung and Buthidaung. The division finally bivouacked at Taung and stayed there until the monsoon started. The combat performance of the units in the above operations is hard to judge. The Kaladan and Kalapanzin operations featured highly mobile, offensive operations with no fronts and a rather amorphous line of communication. Each side knew the other's tactics. The result was a battle of attrition that, however, was interrupted by the coming of the monsoon.

In early June the monsoon struck in full force and military operations receded. 81st Division monsoon dispositions were as follows:

Unit	Location
Headquarters 5 Brigade	Chiringa
5 Gold Coast Regiment	Chiringa
7 Gold Coast Regiment	West African Way Headquarters at Alikadam
8 Gold Coast Regiment	Chiringa
Headquarters 6 Brigade	Bandarban- near Mowdok
4 Nigerian Regiment	Sangu River, Headquarters, Tranchi
1 Sierra Leone Regiment	Singpa
1 Gambia Regiment	Sangu River, Headquarters, Bandarban.

The first Kaladan and Kalapanzin operations were a good source for lessons on the campaign for future operations. Thus with the monsoon, experience of the operations were reviewed and plans for further operations made.

As noted, military operations receded with the advent of the monsoon. But from 1943 onwards, when the reconquest operations began in full force, it was stipulated by the South East Asia Command that in order to surprise the Japanese force operations would generally be continued during the monsoon. While this policy obtained in other parts of Burma, it was impossible in the Arakan because of the heavy rainfall, sometimes as high as two hundred inches per year. The monsoon in the Arakan meant the end of hostilities. The establishment of monsoon positions was designed to find the appropriate place where the health of the soldiers would most likely be preserved.

The conventional belief is that for the 81st Division the first Kaladan campaign was a failure. As the argument runs, the idea of introducing an allied force in the Kaladan was ostensibly to keep the Japanese force from outflanking and surprising the allied force on the main Arakan front, as they had done in the spring of 1943. The 81st Division failed to stop the Tanahashi force on the main Arakan front from moving up between the eastern flank of the 7 Indian Division and the

western flank of the 81st, taking Taung Bazaar from the rear and sweeping around it to cut the Ngakyedauk Pass, trapping the 7 Indian Division on the eastern side of the Mayu Range. As one scholar, though trying to make a case for the air force, bluntly put it " Inasmuch as 81 Division's effort had accomplished nothing in themselves, and since the divisions presence in the Kaladan valley had not prevented Tanahashi's force's making its undetected descent upon the allied rear, the Kaladan phase can hardly be considered successful. It was significant that none of the reverses suffered by 81 Division were attributed in any way to lack of supply."42 But it is an unfair assessment of a depleted division saddled with the tasks of protecting the XV Corp, containing and destroying a force of about the same strength on a broad front and in dense jungle. While it is true that the 81st did not stop the Tanahashi force, the allied force was not suprised. The 7 Indian Division was not suprised because, with the added advantage of air supply, plans were made to have them fight in box formation. As a result of the well laid out plans, the 5 and 7 Indian Divisions were successful in their operations on the main Arakan front, although they did not exploit their victory because of demands on the central front, the siege of Imphal and Kohima. Apart from the minor setback on Pagoda Hill around Thayettabin, the 81st was successful in engaging the Japanese force in the Kaladan and denying it the possibility

of establishing a major base in the Kaladan. It can be gleaned from the casualty figures below that the 81st was not merely a passive army withdrawing to avoid combat during the first Kaladan campaign.

	British	African	Total
Killed	25	162	187
Wounded	101	726	827
Missing	7	150	157
			1,171

The Japanese casualties, including killed, wounded, and missing, was estimated to be about three thousand during the first Kaladan campaign.⁴³

The casualties for the 81st were evacuated through air strips built mainly for air supply. Reinforcements for the division continued throughout the campaign. The chart below is a list of the reinforcements and departures through 1944. It is worthwhile to note that from November 1944 the numbers include that of the 82nd Division.

Reinforcement

Month	British Other Ranks		African Other Ranks	
	Officers	(BORS)	Officers	(AORS)
January	42		95	1,829
February	10		51	1,624
March	17		68	1,129
April (W.A.)	20		53	1,469

April (E.A.)	4	-	124
May	57	112	1,673
June	18	90	996
July	15	87	635
August	29	69	1,212
September	28	97	1,474
October	15	52	1,792
November	101	219	2,162
December	103	215	3,879
Totals	<u>459</u>	<u>1,208</u>	<u>19,998</u>

Departures

Month	Officers	British Other Ranks	African Other Ranks
January	8	21	509
February	12	34	747
March	31	62	1,436
April (W.A.)	16	59	699
April (E.A.)	-	-	13
May	20	46	787
June	33	103	995
July	38	119	2,679
August	24	70	804
September	23	60	754
October	26	98	1,300
November	62	115	1,159
December	<u>187</u>	<u>213</u>	<u>2,888</u>
Totals	<u>480</u>	<u>1,000</u>	<u>14,770</u>

Reinforcements and departures for the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions were centrally organized. The high reinforcement numbers from January through March occurred during the period of major engagements in the Kaladan and underscores the point that at all times during the period the 81st maintained intense operations against the Japanese force in the Kaladan. Around April, the drop was because of the move to the Kalapanzin and also the fact that operations were beginning to slow down because of the coming of the monsoon.

The figures for the East African Scout Battalion are included because they served with the 81st during this period. In August and September, the numbers gradually pick up because of allied post-monsoon plans which called for more troops in the Kaladan. Finally, it is important to note that the figures for officers and British Other Ranks include all non black African officers. Thus all Polish and Rhodesian officer personnel are included in this category.⁴⁴ The major reinforcement problem was due to lack of officers. As a result, in September 1944, General Albert Wedemeyer of the United States army had suggested the use of certain U.S. company grade officers. But this was vehemently opposed by General Giffard, the Commander in Chief, Eleventh Army Group.⁴⁵ It is not clear why Giffard opposed the using of United States officers; perhaps it might be because of the different styles of conducting military operations. For instance, in British military tradition, offensive operations are carried out in a peripheral manner, while the United States tradition called for a direct assault on the objective. Secondly, the British tended to be conservative in the employment of their resources, including munitions, while the United States with her enormous economic resources, would employ all her resources, sometimes wastefully. Finally, the United States tried to shorten the length of time of an operation so as to avoid the harmful effects of adverse public opinion, but for the British this was much

less of a factor. Nevertheless, the problem remained, and in December 1944, South-East Asia Command requested, subject to the approval by the General Officer Commanding West Africa, surplus New Zealand officers to serve with 81st and 82nd West African Divisions. The GOC West Africa opposed using New Zealanders except if they came through West Africa and received "essential instruction in West African psychology, customs and limitations" not only with regard to military performance, but also to African welfare and sensitivities. But "if manpower situation renders it impracticable", he continued, and "if future drafts from the U.K. will not be up to U.K. standards", he suggested a limited number of New Zealanders be employed.⁴⁶ It is not known if officers came direct to Burma from U.K. or New Zealand but officers continued to come from West Africa.

On departures, the figures include all non divisional units. The 55 West African base in India handled the departure of personnel, and also of reinforcements, training, deployment, and the holding of transit personnel. During the monsoon, senior officers of the South-East Asia Command visited 55 Base leave camp located at Ranchi, India. At various times also, the West African traditional ruler, the Emir of Katsina (in the present day Katsina State of Nigeria) visited the soldiers. Recreation and religious services were held for the soldiers at the camp.

The monsoon season was a time for the review of past operations and seeking to correct and improve on them. With regard to the Japanese, their tactics remained essentially the same; there was nothing new seen in the Kaladan campaign. They infiltrated, felt for flanks, and maneuvered. They employed roadblocks to cut off a retiring force or to protect one or both flanks of an encircling movement or as part of a defensive system. The American appreciation of Japanese tactics contended that their offensive tactics were based on deception and rapid maneuver, surprise and mobility. "Discipline, lack of imagination and fatalism", the appreciation continued, "drives them on despite losses." Furthermore, they favored night operations because it helped them achieve surprise and negated the enemy's advantage in firepower. They infiltrated to cause havoc in the rear. Most of the time they employed a two-tier defense position, and reconnoitered before an assault.⁴⁷

For the 81st, the Kaladan operations were full of lessons to be learned as to tactics, air support, and on the role of the foot carriers. Although the Japanese tactics were well known to the allied force, the response to them differed from front to front. For instance, in defense, all troops, even if surrounded, had to be trained to stand firm and not panic or withdraw. There should be mobile reserves at all times, which should not be tied to holding positions, in order to

strike at the main penetration. For example, because grossly undermanned for their role, the units of the 81st on Pagoda Hill could not counter-attack the Japanese force assaulting. Defensive tactics must be blended with offensive action to achieve good results. Finally, administrative units and installations must be protected and be ready for all-round defence.⁴⁸ The 6 (W.A.) Brigade from the Kalapanzin had had to be sent back to the Kaladan to secure, among other things, dumps and installations at Mowdok when they were threatened by the Japanese. Military prudence demanded that such dumps and installations be properly defended when sufficient troops were available.

As mentioned earlier, there were no major problems with air support and air supply organization. Air support had its merits and demerits. Tactical air support helped ease control and administration of units because they concentrated when such support was in progress. In the Kaladan this was crucial because of the 81st's lack of artillery. Air strikes were always called for before an objective could be assaulted. Air support also forced dispersion on the enemy, who would spread out to avoid the impact of heavy concentrated bombing. Tactical air support aided full mobility by day for the allies and consequently restricted enemy large scale movement to night. In the Arakan operations, air supply, air support, and evacuation of

casualties functioned with great regularity and efficiency. Supply aircraft helped deceive the enemy on movements by sometimes making dummy supply drops. Through photographic reconnaissance, semi-strategic strikes at enemy positions were possible. The constant appearance of the aircraft also made enemy artillery very reluctant to open up by day. This was extremely valuable because it off-set Japanese gun range superiority. Above all, tactical air support in the Kaladan operation as well as in most other operations was a great morale booster.

One important demerit of tactical air support was that the material effect of strikes in direct support of the infantry was small because in the Kaladan jungle it was rare for infantry to locate accurately much of an enemy position. The use of large bombs and depth charges only helped defoliate the forest and the result was the ability of the defender to increase fields of fire. With high level bombing, it was hard for infantry to close in quickly because of the Kaladan terrain. Thus after an allied bombing, the Japanese soldier, a master in evading strikes, quickly re-occupied positions before the allied infantry closed in. It was thought, therefore, to use dummy strikes, or use delayed action or harmless noise bombs during the later part of the strikes, to enable the infantry to close in, or have the air support come from an air strip immediately in the rear and in

direct communication with the forward troops. This would make impossible a rapid change of position by the enemy.⁴⁹

The success of air power in all its ramifications in the Kaladan campaign have helped obscure the importance of the foot carriers. Air supply offered mobility, but the actual movement of supplies to locations from where they would be directly employed for operations was done by the carriers attached to the various units of the division. The carriers were essential because the Kaladan jungle did not have motorable roads. Since the carriers were an important factor in the first Kaladan campaign, it was agreed amongst the authorities that they be made more effective for the upcoming operations.⁵⁰ In the first campaign, there were a large number of unarmed carriers. The reason for having unarmed carriers was because it was difficult to both carry heavy loads and fight at the same time. But the problem was psychological. Indeed, knowing that they were not armed made the carriers liable to panic flight. Thus, for the post-monsoon operations the Divisional commander ordered the arming of a substantial number of them to allay such fear, since they already had the basic military training.

In conclusion, the authorities agreed that to reduce Japanese positions in the Arakan, or especially the Kaladan, operations had to proceed slowly. They also realized that it

was hard to dislodge the Japanese from their entrenched positions. The nature of the terrain, the slopes, ridges and chaungs helped confine movement to a few narrow routes. A relatively small unit could dig in and with good fire-power hold off a larger force. So the 81st prepared for a long drawn-out campaign.

Throughout the monsoon, deep patrolling and minor operations continued in the Arakan. Elsewhere, on other fronts in Burma operations continued at the pre-monsoon level to catch the Japanese off-guard. For the post-monsoon operations in the Arakan, however, it was realized that due to logistical difficulties, the planned amphibious operation was not feasible. The 5 and 7 Indian Divisions, the 36 British Division and 3 Commando Brigade had all been detailed to other fronts. Furthermore, it was not known whether enough landing craft would be available since the South-East Asia Command ranked low among other theaters for equipment. In all, it made the task of the infantry in the second Kaladan campaign more demanding. Finally, during the monsoon interlude, because of the lack of specialized units for amphibious, jungle or airborne operations, all full divisions were now trained in all types of warfare.

For the post-monsoon operations, the Supreme Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten, instructed all the Commanders in

Chief to prepare for future operations along the lines of Operation Dracula and Capital. In the Arakan, as a result, Gen. Giffard ordered Gen. Slim to secure with minimum troops the present forward positions in the Maungdaw Tunnels. In that regard, and with a view to protecting the air forces and lines of communication in the area west of the Mayu Range, Slim sought to prevent the enemy from penetrating the Kaladan valley.

The Kaladan operation was planned to coincide with the offensive on the central front after the monsoon. In preparation, the 81st moved southward along the jeep track to Chiringa and bivouacked at Singpa. By the end of October the division was deployed in the Kaladan. On 8th November the Supreme Commander issued a directive to clear Arakan - Operation Romulus - and capture Akyab - Operation Talon - by amphibious assault, not later than the end of January.⁵¹ But, before long, the command situation changed. The allied Land Forces South East Asia (A.L.F.S.E.A.) was established.

The A.L.F.S.E.A. was to come into effect 12th November 1944. In essence A.L.F.S.E.A. replaced the Eleventh Army Group and included all the land forces on the United States front in Burma - the North Combat Area Command (N.C.A.C.). The reshuffle was done to accede to the decision of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff that the China-Burma-

India (C.B.I.) theater be divided into China and the India-Burma theaters. Lt. Gen. Oliver Leese became the commander of the new command, taking over the Eleventh Army Group, thus succeeding Gen. Giffard, who was dropped entirely in the new command structure. To make the command a true allied command, unlike the Eleventh Army Group, a number of United States Army Staff Officers, such as Brigadier General Ray Maddocks was appointed as part of A.L.F.S.E.A. headquarters staff.

Leese's command now became:

the Fourteenth Army, which consist of 4 Corps and 33 Corps only. XV Corps formerly under Fourteenth Army was dropped because of their forthcoming operations on the Central Front;

XV Corps which would operate in Arakan parallel with, and in support of Fourteenth Army;

Lines of communication Command which had just been formed at Comilla on 12th November (at the instance of Gen. Giffard) to relieve Lt. Gen. Slim of administrative responsibilities in the rear areas and enable him to concentrate on the battle;

36 British Division which was under the operational control of N.C.A.C.; and

Ceylon Army Command with various garrisons in the Indian Ocean Islands.

Leese, through Lt. Gen. Daniel Sultan, USA, also had operational control over all the American, Chinese and British forces in the N.C.A.C. or the "Chinese Expeditionary Force from Yunan crossing the border from China into Burma"52, a control that Gen. Giffard as Eleventh Army Commander had not had. Vicariously, Leese also functioned as the Commander in Chief, Eastern Fleet and Allied Air Commander in Chief.

All in all, the new command set-up did not affect, at least in the Kaladan, the planned post-monsoon operations. Thus, with everything in place, the die was cast for the second Kaladan campaign which featured among other things the entering of the 82nd (W.A.) Division.

Footnotes

1. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 1943-1945, Paragraph 37.
2. Ibid. paragraphs 33-35.
3. On the 3rd West African Brigade with Wingates' Chindits, see Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp.411-427.
4. Ibid. pp.512-513.
5. Ibid. p.381.
6. _PRO,WO 172/4054: Divisional Resume, December 1943.
7. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.381.
8. _PRO,WO 172/4054: 81 West African Division Operation Order #1.
9. Ibid. Appreciation by Division Commander 81st Division.
10. Ibid.
11. _PRO,WO 172/6589: 81 West African Division Operations Instruction #13.
12. _PRO,WO 172/4054: Divisional Resume, December 1943.
13. Doc.# Movs.S.223, Box 98, RG 331, NA-SEAC War Diary, December 21, 1943.
14. _PRO,WO 172/4054: 81 West African Division Operations Instruction #8, Appendix M.
15. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.385.
16. Doc.# Movs.S.223, Box 98, RG 331, NA-SEAC War Diary, December 21, 1943.
17. Doc.#P90 37/2, Box 98, RG 331, NA-SEAC War Diary, December 21, 1943.
18. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.385.
19. Ibid. p.386. On the 4 Nigerian Regiment operations, see _PRO, WO 172/6685: Report on the Action in the Pansanwa

area 19 and 20th January, 1944, appendix T.

20. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.386.
21. Slim, Defeat into Victory, p.152.
22. _PRO,WO 172/6685: Report on the Action in the Kanwa Area, 24-28 January, 1944, appendix V. See also Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.386.
23. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 1943-45, paragraphs 61-62.
24. Ibid. paragraph 63.
25. Ibid. paragraph 68.
26. Document Anon., Field Command Records, Box 1447, RG 165, NA.
27. _PRO,WO 172/6698: 1 S.L.R., Report of Action from 0630hrs on February 11 to the Occupation of Medaung 0230hrs 13/14 February; Occupation of Khaungdok by Fighting Patrols 1400hrs 16 February, appendix J24.
28. _PRO,WO 172/6699: Report on the Crossing of River Pi Chaung and Securing of Kyauktaw 19-24 February, 1944. Much as there was no radio communication, the commander constantly sent provisions and patrols to keep in touch. But in such operations as in all military operations in progress contact at all times is necessary. This was the case in the Kanwa operations.
29. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.391.
30. _PRO,WO 172/6589: Appreciation by Commander 81st Division, February 28, 1944.
31. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp.391-392.
32. _PRO,WO 172/6589: Appreciation by Commander 81st Division, February 28, 1944.
33. Ibid.
34. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.395.

35. _PRO,WO 172/6699: Report Together with Appendices on Action which Took Place on Pagoda Hill Area, 2/3 March, 1944, appendix I. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.392, conclude erroneously that the Pagoda Hill disaster was caused because the African soldiers could only operate on terrains were they could have the natural defence of the jungle. The operations at Medaung and elsewhere disprove all this.
36. _PRO,WO 172/6589: Japanese Order of Battle, March 1944.
37. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.394.
38. _PRO,WO 172/6685: Battle at the chaung junc. 927538, 14 March, 1944, appendix m; Operations-Action on Sebaseik-18 March, 1944, appendix q.
39. _PRO,WO 172/6589: Japanese Order of Battle, March 1944.
40. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp.398-399.
41. Kirby S. Woodburn, The War Against Japan, Vol.3, p.275.
42. Joe G. Taylor, Air Supply in the Burma Campaign, p.152.
43. The 81st Division figures is based on Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.405 and for the Japanese force, calculation is based on information contained in _PRO,WO 172/6589: Resume, 26 March to 4 April, 1944.
44. The figures are culled from _PRO,WO 172/6786: Headquarters West African Reinforcement Camp (Training), India Command.
45. Doc.# pso mtg 60, Box 101, RG 331, NA-SEAC War Diary, September 25, 1944.
46. Doc.# PAO/RFT/7/A, Box 102, RG 331, NA-SEAC War Diary, December 7, 1944.
47. Japanese in Battle; Enemy Methods, General Headquarters India, Military Intelligence Directorate, part 1, Field Command Records, Box 1447, RG 165, NA.
48. _PRO-WO 231/20: Appendix G - Lessons from Operations.
49. Ibid. Appendix 13 - Advantages and Limitations of Air Support in Hill Jungle Warfare as illustrated by the

Kaladan Operations of 81st Division in 1944/45.

50. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp.404-405.
51. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 1943-45, paragraph 241.
52. Ibid. paragraphs 268-269.
53. Ibid. paragraph 269.

Chapter Four

The Crossed Spears: The 82nd Division and the end of Arakan operations.

The 82nd (W.A.) Division, with Maj.Gen.Mcl Bruce commanding, arrived in India in early 1944 after a voyage via the Suez Canal. The division was primarily composed of 1 brigade made up of 1, 2, 3 Nigerian Regiments (hereafter N.R.) and 5 Auxiliary Group; 2 brigade comprising of 1, 2, 3 Gold Coast Regiments (hereafter G.C.R.)and 6 Auxiliary Group; 4 brigade had 5, 9, 10 N.R. and 2 Auxiliary Group. The entire division including divisional troops averaged fifteen thousand troops. Like the 81st Division it was essentially an infantry division.1 It had as its insignia two crossed spears passing through a head pad. It was a testimony to the important role played by the auxiliary groups - the foot carriers - who carried heavy loads through unmotorable terrain, thereby enhancing mobility for the division. In the jungles of Burma that role was invaluable.

In West Africa, before leaving for Burma, the 82nd Division had lost most of her trained and experienced personnel to the 81st Division, the first to depart. Thus, on the eve of her departure for the Burma theater, the 82nd was still grappling with the problem of un-trained, inexperienced soldiers. Training of units of the 82nd Division was intense and similar to that of the 81st Division. Their training was

broken into two phases. Phase one was training for general warfare which included weapons training, physical training, battle drill, field craft and assault courses. General staff duties with regard to administration, documentation and organization was part of this phase.²

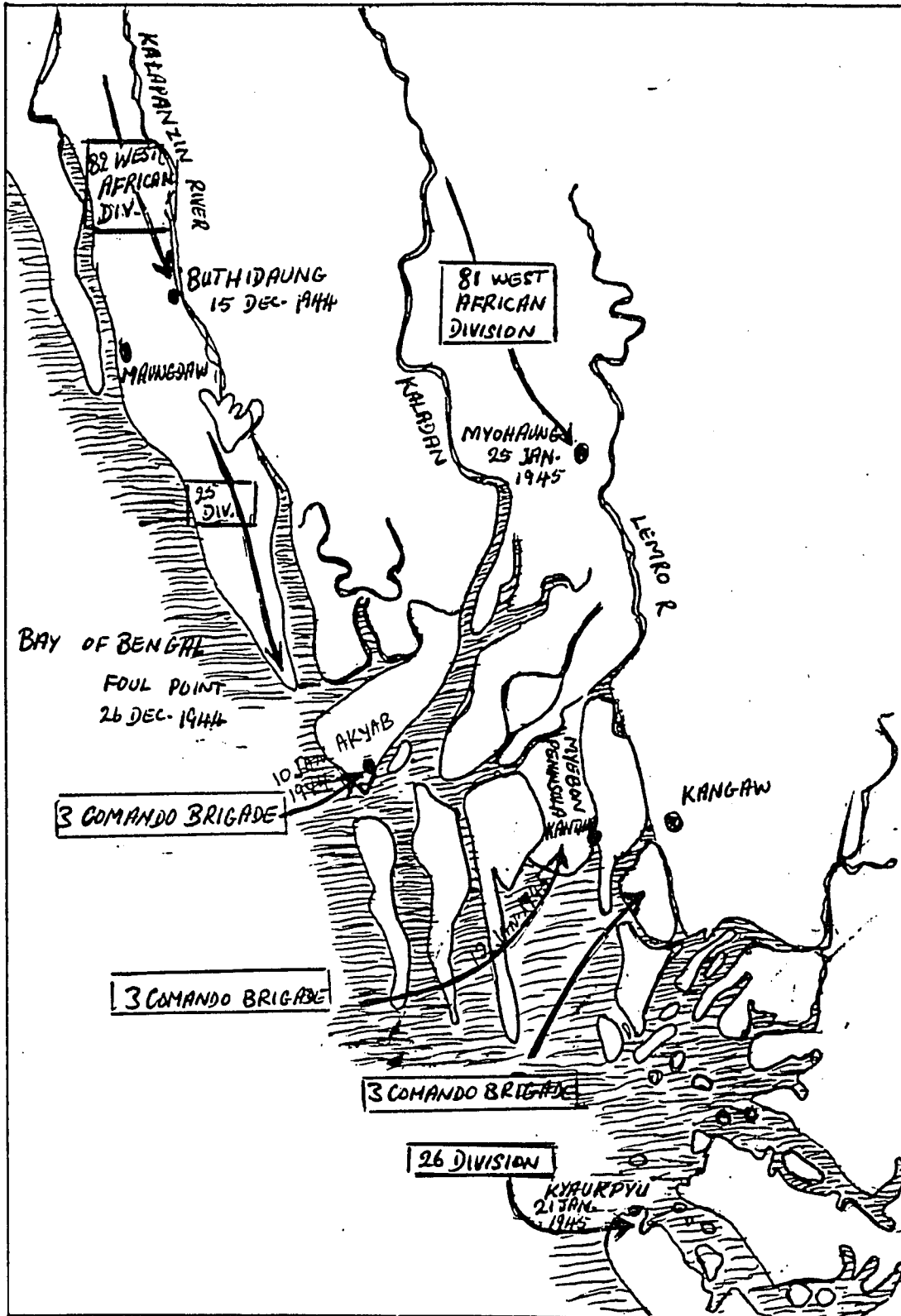
The second phase of training was in jungle warfare. Emphasis was on the psychological preparation for war, which included assault courses, night training, endurance marches, and swamp and river crossing. This phase of their training also stressed discipline, and health and sanitation. While the initiative of the individual soldier was stressed because the unexpected was commonplace in jungle terrain, the immense responsibility of the African non-commissioned officers was invaluable.³ This was very important because from experience it was learned that the Japanese soldiers went after the British officers whose neutralization, it was believed, would cause command to break down, and the unit would be routed.⁴

In India, however, the units of the division were stationed around Ranchi, Calcutta and Chas. Intense training was not possible because the immediate surrounding country was unsuitable. However, time was spent on re-equipment and other important aspects of training that did not require jungle terrain. For instance, various individual shooting

positions especially the importance of learning to shoot comfortably from kneeling and standing positions were practised.⁵ Learning from the experience of the 81st Division, the 82nd trained in defensive warfare.⁶ It was stipulated that ground should be effectively used. Every single soldier should dig at least two weapons pits. Furthermore, advancing under covering fire was taught. Finally, river crossing in open country and night attacks were also part of their training.⁷

The role of the division on arrival in India was not clear. Initially, it was suggested that the division be used to reinforce the 81st Division.⁸ But after the arduous campaign of 1943-44, it was decided that the 81st Division be replaced by the 82nd Division for the second Kaladan campaign of 1944-45. In the end, however, they ended up operating alongside the 81st Division up until the capture of Myohaung in January 1945, when the 81st was withdrawn, and the 82nd Division saw the campaign through to the end.

During the monsoon, however, the allied forces maintained active defence in the Arakan, especially on the general line Maungdaw-Tunnels area and Taung Bazaar. For the 1944-45 operations the allied objective was to capture Akyab and to tie down and destroy the Japanese in the Arakan which might be used against the Fourteenth Army on the central front. But



THIRD ARAKAN CAMPAIGN
NOTE: COMMANDO BRIGADES AND 26 (INDIAN) DIVISION WAS

RAMREE ISLAND

to carry out this objective, plan replaced plan in swift succession as a result of logistics and Japanese re-grouping. Initially, the plan was to secure forward positions in the Maungdaw-Tunnels Area and prevent enemy penetration in the Kaladan valley. However, in September, the Arakan forces were asked to secure the area Chittagong-Cox's Bazaar to prevent enemy interference with future airborne operations. Thereafter, the plan was to secure the estuary of the Naf as a base for light coastal forces and landing craft, carry out reconnaissance, bombardments, and raids from the sea along the whole Arakan coast so as to force the enemy to lock up troops in this area. Finally, to exploit any withdrawal of Japanese forces in the Arakan. Later, in November, the final instruction was to specifically secure Chittagong-Cox's Bazaar, a landward advance in Arakan down the Mayu Peninsula, the Kalapanzin, and Kaladan valley to destroy or expel the enemy in the general area north of Foul Point-Kudaung Island-Minbya; and an amphibious assault on Akyab island with air and sea bombardment support; and finally, to secure firmly the area north of the general line Akyab-Minbya.⁹

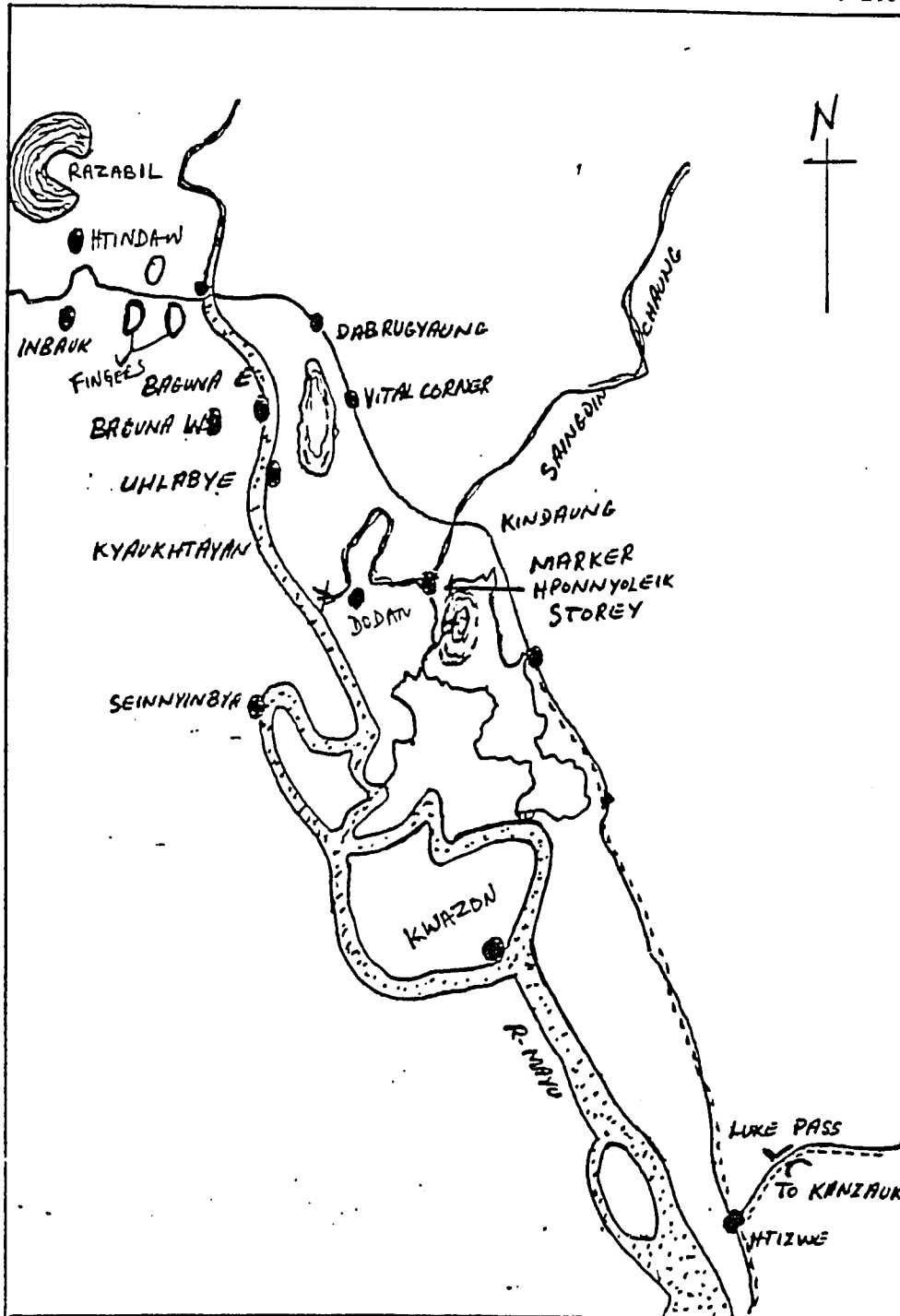
The major operations of the 82nd Division were in the Kalapanzin sector, the capture of Myohaung, operations in support of allied landings in Kangaw, operations on the Dalet, Letmauk, An, Tamandu country and, finally, the clearing of South Arakan, enabling amphibious operations to

be mounted on Rangoon in May, 1945.

The first operation was in the Kalapanzin sector. In the Arakan, there were roughly three sectors. The Kalapanzin, Central and Kaladan sectors. The Kalapanzin and the Kaladan served as the flanks of the Central sector where the 25th Indian Division was based. Operations in the Kalapanzin and Kaladan sectors were important because the two main rivers in Arakan, the Kalapanzin and Kaladan rivers, have their tributaries converging on Akyab whose capture and control was the main allied objective. Moreover, a three sector advance to Akyab would not only spread Japanese defences but protect every sector from being encircled.

The 82nd Division on the Kalapanzin sector was ordered to protect the eastern flank of XV Corps against Japanese hooks through the hills, and at the same time act as the left flank guard of the 25 (Indian) Division during their advance to Foul Point on the Mayu peninsula.¹⁰ This order was part of a general order to secure the area Chittagong - Cox's Bazaar to prevent enemy interference from preparations for a future airborne offensive.

The preliminary operations for the 82nd Division started on the 12th of December and D-Day was tentatively scheduled for the 14th. To carry out the allotted task the GOC appreciated



82nd (W.A.) DIVISION IN THE MAYU OFFENSIVE, 1944-45

that protection of the eastern flank rested largely on the 81st Division in the Kaladan valley, and the speed of its advance southward. Operating on the eastern flank meant operating on the small strip Taung Bazaar to Kwason, approximately one hundred to two hundred yards wide. Secondly, the protection of 25 (Indian) Division would necessitate that his plan conform to that of that division. Finally, lack of knowledge of the Arakan country and the Division's late arrival there would make the movement of the division slower than that of the more experienced 25 (Indian) Division.11

Gen. Mcl Bruce posited that on the eastern flank the Japanese could stay on their present position and resist doggedly. The Japanese problem, however, was that with their manpower shortage--they might after all give up this idea. Perhaps instead they might slip away to the south to a previously prepared location. But if they opted for this solution they would have to accept a loss of face with the local inhabitants. Finally, and most realistically, they might want to fight a delaying action and slip away when their line of communication was seriously threatened. This strategy would give them time, and yet being in a defensive role, their casualties would not be heavy. They would have enough time to take the offensive around the middle of March when the monsoon would make possible allied landings from the

sea extremely difficult and Japanese troops tied up in coast defence would be released for possible offensive operations.¹² This strategy assured the Japanese proximity to the coast, which was an intrinsic part of their military operations. While closeness to the coast might fulfill the principle of the offensive, it laid waste those of mobility and security. Thus, overland hooks would go a long way to disorganize Japanese defences. At least this was the case during the capture of Myohaung and on operations along An and Taungup passes. But with the possible release of troops from coastal defence, the Japanese might tie up the 81st Division in the Kaladan, dangerously exposing the Corps left flank to a counter offensive to the north through the Tawbya route.

At all events, however, the GOC had some restrictions on his offensive plans. First, until the general line Kwason-Taungmaw was reached, XV Corp's initial disposition and task laid down that he could only operate with two brigades. Secondly, until D-Day was finally decided on, the GOC could not know whether he would begin operation with one or two brigades. Thirdly, the division was located to the east of the Kalapanzin. Finally, the division's plans had to be flexible until the enemy attacked or D-Day commenced because the position might change before then.¹³

On D-Day, therefore, if the enemy still held the Massif,

the Bulge, and the feature north-east of the Bulge, the division would attack and capture the Massif and other occupied features north of Buthidaung from the west or from the south. The clearing of these positions would open communications between Taung and Buthidaung. Or, they might outflank the Massif and other features, secure Buthidaung and the Ferry by gaining the features known as East and West Fingers from the south. Whoever held East Finger controlled the general line Buthidaung and the Ferry. Moreover, on Massif because of the nature of the position only a direct attack could liquidate the enemy from their position. It could lead to a large number of casualties. Nevertheless, having secured Buthidaung and the Ferry, the next step was to cross the Kalapanzin River, for operations against Kudaung. Finally, attack Kudaung from the west and south crossing the Kalapanzin River in the vicinity of its junction with the Saingdin Chaung.¹⁴ The operations from D-Day generally followed this second proposition, the control of Buthidaung-Kudaung via an attack from East and West finger.

But operations leading to D-Day began two days earlier on 12th December, 1944. 1 and 2 West African Brigades of the 82nd Division concentrated at Htindaw between Razabil and Buthidaung. On the 14th, 1 Brigade advanced on Baguna and 2 Brigade on Buthidaung. 4 Brigade advanced on the Japanese still in the upper Kalapanzin. About one and half miles from

southern Buthidaung to the west were a cluster of small hills known as 'West' and 'East' Finger. North of West Finger, a block of hills separate it from the road and was known as the Massif. The distance between the Massif and West Finger was known as the 'Gate'. It was taken on 13th December by 25 (Indian) Division.

The following day, supported by artillery and tanks, 2 Brigade took over the Gate from 51 (Indian) Brigade. However, to achieve that objective, and to protect the rest of 2 Brigade, 1 Gold Coast Regiment (G.C.R.) and 3 G.C.R. was directed on East Finger and Buthidaung respectively. There was no major engagement except that C Company/ 1 N.R. of 1 Brigade in consort with 1st Battalion of G.C.R. of 2 Brigade neutralized the enemy at the southern end of East Finger. By the morning of December 15, 1944 all intended positions were held firmly. Thereafter, 2 Brigade was detailed for the defence of the entire XV Corps base in the Buthidaung area.

Meanwhile, 1 Brigade with 1 Nigerian Regiment N.R. leading headed for Baguna East. Fighting patrols which were sent out to the foothills and surrounding country encountered minor opposition from the enemy. In an attempt to outflank them they drew fire mutually supporting the post first encountered. The patrol commander skillfully manoeuvred and was able to inflict about fifteen casualties. Later on,

the brigade was detailed to Baguna West less 2 N.R. in divisional reserve at Inbauk.

3 N.R. on 16 December took over another important position known as the 'Sponge Finger', after crossing the river. The following day they established at 'Vital Corner' and set-up communication with 2 Brigade at Buthidaung. It was still the beginning of the 82nd Divisions' indoctrination into combat.

The stiffest resistance from the Japanese came when 2 N.R. just out of divisional reserve was trying to form a bridgehead west of Dodan, at Saingdin Chaung. Although not always in great numbers the Japanese tended to challenge chaung or river crossings. On December 18, an attack by 2 N.R. with the help of 104 Mortar Battery failed to dislodge the enemy who was firmly entrenched at Dodan. On the 19th, one Company tried again unsuccessfully. Enemy defensive fire was heavy and accurate upon the assaulting troops. A third assault by A Company failed to dislodge the enemy. Indeed, the open nature of the terrain, the lack of intelligence on enemy numbers and the fact that the enemy had been reinforced from Hponnyoleik made this effort futile. An outflanking maneuver by units of 2 N.R. through Seinnyinbya, although receiving artillery fire and sniping, was able to overcome enemy resistance. On 22nd December Dodan, Hponnyoleik and the feature 'Storey' were occupied. This resistance was overcome

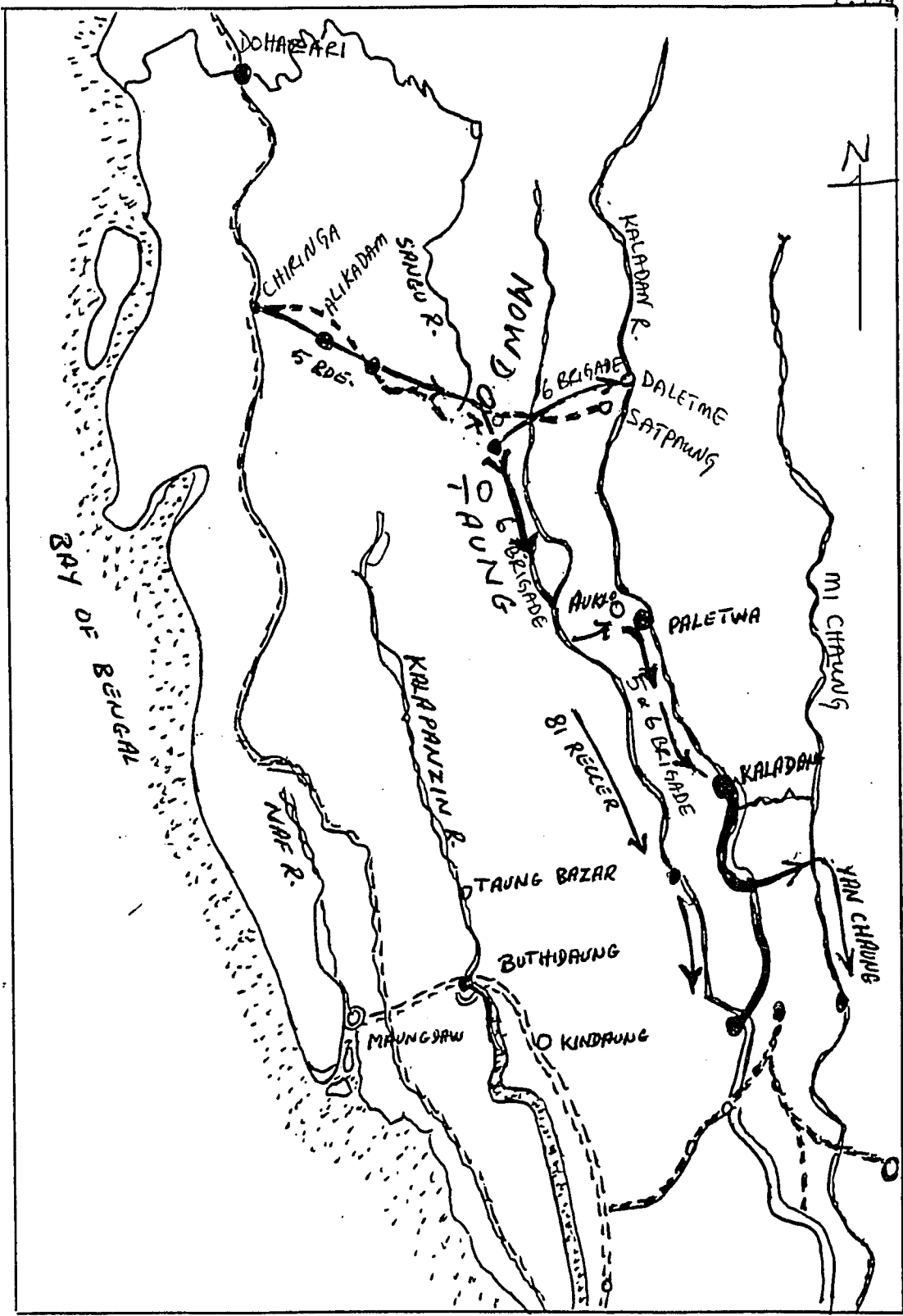
with about one hundred casualties of which eighty or more came from 2 N.R.15. Meanwhile, 1 N.R. was operating on the general axis from north of Kindaung across to the Saingdin Chaung. By the 20th of December the feature known as 'Marker' was cleared.

4 Brigade continued exploiting southwards after clearing enemy pockets on the Kalapanzin valley from Taung to Buthidaung. To hasten their advance, one company of 3 N.R. was detailed to secure the left flank of the 53rd (Indian) Brigade operating on the west bank of the river and to threaten the enemy's line of communication around Zedidaung. By the 25th of December they made contact with 4 Brigade which was concentrated around Htizwe ready to advance into the Kaladan via Kanzauk for the second Kaladan campaign. The rest of the Division, 1 Brigade, concentrated on the western tip of the position known as Luke Pass, controlled by 1 N.R. of the Brigade who also patrolled as far as Rathedaung. 1 Brigade, it was planned was to follow 4 Brigade into the Kaladan. 2 Brigade protected the maintenance area of the XV Corp around Buthidaung. At this point, however, it is necessary to review what the 81st Division had been doing in the Kaladan.

The initial plan called for the 81st Division to be withdrawn from the Arakan before the Fall/Spring operations

of 1944-45 for rest and refitting. But due to the urgent need to clear the Arakan of Japanese and to free units for operations elsewhere, this plan was not possible. Instead, they were part of the first set of troops assembled for the 1944-45 offensive in the Arakan. Furthermore, because of their earlier experience in the Kaladan, they were detailed to operate in the Kaladan. This time, however, the officer command level was different. Maj.Gen. F.J. Loftus-Tottenham took over from Maj. Gen. Woolner as GOC, while Brigadier A.A. Crooks replaced Brigadier R.N. Cartwright, who died of typhus in July, as Commander 6 Brigade.¹⁶ This time, however, the number of troops available with increased firepower was substantial. Reinforcements included the 81 Reconnaissance Regiment which joined the division half way into the first Kaladan campaign and an Indian Mountain Artillery regiment. Supply of the division, as before, was by air. Carriers were used with supplements from pack mules and river transport to disperse supplies to various units.¹⁷

On the advance into the Kaladan, the commander appreciated that he might move with two brigades down the Pi Chaung and the Kaladan respectively. But it would be a dangerous proposition because, with two brigades, he lacked depth and there was the possibility of the two units being isolated and destroyed in detail. Another option was to advance strongly



81st (W.A.) DIVISION ADVANCE DOWN THE KALADAN, DECEMBER/JANUARY 1944-45

with the two brigades in one valley and send out a flank protection. In the event, however, he chose a middle course. He advanced on both sides of the valley and later moved to the eastern side of the Kaladan River with 81 Reconnaissance Regiment acting as a flank guard on the west.

The move which began in October was carried out in two stages. The first was from Bidonegyaungwa to the Kaladan village and the second was an advance to the general line Kyauktaw - Myohaung - Kanzauk. This move by the division down the Kaladan valley took into consideration the earlier failure around the Kyauktaw plain (Pagoda Hill). In this regard, therefore, they were instructed "to outflank Kyauktaw and Thayettabin (where the enemy was concentrating most of his forces) in the east with the main body of the division; while a holding force remained on the west bank to act as a flank and rear guard to the main force, and to deceive the enemy as to the direction of the main thrust".¹⁸ This particular instruction is significant for two reasons. First, was the employment of a wholesale deception plan. In jungle warfare, because large units (like two divisions) can not be moved easily due to terrain difficulties, deception is necessary to keep the enemy guessing as to your movements. Secondly, and most important of all, was the need to protect the main force. Protecting the main force meant staying in close touch with the force and thus reaping the triple

advantage of firepower, numerical superiority and relatively easy administrative control. It will be recalled that during the Pagoda Hill failure in the Spring of 1944, the 81st division units were tackling too many objectives, and the unit that failed at Pagoda Hill was a small force, lightly armed and without any immediate support and not trained for a defensive role.

The Japanese, after the Fall/Spring 1943-44 engagements, had begun to take the Kaladan sector very seriously. Around the middle of October under the command of Maj. Gen. Koba, the Japanese had set-up a 'Kaladan Defence Force' to hold the Akyab -Kaladan line and cover the withdrawal of their forces on the Mayu front. The force consisted of the following: 55th Division Cavalry, 111th Regiment, 4 Companies of 143rd Regiment, 1 Battalion Indian National Army (predominantly made up of Indian nationals supporting the Japanese cause but mixed with a few Japanese), and about three thousand divisional and army troops. 3\111th Regiment from Akyab was advanced forward in support of the troops in the north, while 2\111th Regiment was kept in reserve. As a result, only the 1\111th held Akyab. This force, it was correctly believed, sprawled over a wide axis from Htittaw to Kyauktaw and Thayettabin, where they expected to engage the allied force in the Kaladan.¹⁹ The Kaladan campaign had finally lured the Japanese forces from their main base, Akyab, which was the

allied principle objective in the Arakan. Now, Akyab was vulnerable to be overrun by allied amphibious forces or troops operating from the central front.

The 81st Division advance into the Kaladan was slow but smooth with only minor engagements with pockets of Japanese. The advance was deliberate so as to avoid the unexpected which in the Kaladan jungle meant isolation, infiltration and encirclement by Japanese troops. By 4th December, 6 Brigade occupied Orama. 5 Brigade and 81 Reconnaissance Regiment, who had joined the Brigade at Kyingri, moved across Orama to the east bank where they concentrated in a 'box' formation (with all necessary supplies and logistics for offense and defense), near Tinma. However, at Kyingri, a 'Holdforce' consisting of 21st (W.A.) Anti-Tank Regiment operating as infantry and 81 Reconnaissance Regiment less one squadron was ordered to patrol southwards and also clear the Soutcol route leading to the Kalapanzin. The security of the Soutcol route was important because of the expected movement of the 82nd Division from the Kalapanzin to the Kaladan valley. Finally, the unit was ordered to maintain communication with patrols from Taung. The further movement of the rest of the 81st Division was toward Thandada but it was to be carried out deceptively so as to deny the Japanese knowledge of their intentions.

Meanwhile the Japanese force occupied the general line Kyauktaw - Thayettabin. They chose this line because earlier in the Spring they had been successful against units of the 81st Division on Pagoda Hill. As Maj. Gen. Sakurai, the commander of 55 Japanese Divisional Infantry Group, had earlier said, "as they had previously suffered defeat, should a portion of them waver the whole of them will at once get confused and victory is certain."²⁰ But it was a gross underestimation of the intelligence of the West African force commanders. Basic military theory stipulates that you do not fight your enemy on his own terms and where he is comfortable. The West African forces knew that.

On the east bank of the river around Tinma, the 81st Division, less Holdforce, had concentrated. Patrolling was done vigorously and one of these patrols, known as 'Coaster,' was sent as far as Thayettabin. Comprising one company of 5 Brigade and a battery of artillery, the patrol was to deceive the enemy as to an impending attack on Thayettabin. To further sell the deception, as Haywood and Clarke described, "Holdforce patrolled vigorously southwards as if to tie down the enemy in preparation for an advance down the west bank of the river. Three old jeeps, brought in by air, were driven about ostentatiously by day and with blazing headlights after dark around Kyingri to give the impression that heavy equipment had been received".²¹ This ruse deceived the enemy

into expecting an advance on Thayettabin that never materialized. Yet another deception was carried out on 18th December with the entry of the bulk of the 81st Division into Thandada. A small deception unit was left around Tinma to deceive the enemy that the bulk of the division was still there. But the rest of the division led by 6 Brigade maintained radio silence and on the 24th of December with Divisional Headquarters entered Thandada. The movement was so swift that the Japanese remained across the valley on either side of Kyauktaw waiting for the 81st Division to exploit from the north. The Japanese unit were now being beaten badly in their own game, deception.

But why would units of the 81st not want to give battle to the Japanese, as they were numerically superior. Deception is not timidity. It was necessary so as to achieve surprise. But the 81st employed deception because the enemy "had a great advantage in number and weight of guns."²² The Japanese infantry was equipped with Rifle Type 1, 6.5 mm. caliber, the Nambu Type 11 light machine gun and the artillery had Model 97 81mm. mortars. Thus if battle was given on the Kyauktaw-Thayettabin plain, the 81st might not stand a chance. In any event, the outflanking movement was done in the hilly country east of the valley where the Japanese artillery would not be of optimum use. But the deception force did not maintain a passive contact with the enemy. On

the night of the 15th of December, Coaster (the deception force) made contact with the enemy around Khabaw. Enemy reaction was swift and intense. 'A' Company of 5 G.C.R. bore the brunt of the attack. The report from an officer of the battalion shows the intensity of their engagement.

"On this narrow ridge the battle swayed backwards and forwards for nearly seven hours in the darkness, amidst 'Banzais' from the Japanese and counter yells from the Africans, who were in their element. At one stage Jap and African were actually firing at each other at less than five yards' range, and one African, worried by the fire of a wounded Jap near-by, crawled out of his foxhole and finished him with his machete. ... As the ground lay they could be given none of that flanking fire which normally is the real strength of a defensive position, but with rifle, grenade and other automatic weapons they had fought the battle out themselves at a few yards' range."²³

The battle earned 'A' company one D.C.M. and five M.M. with nine killed and thirty-six wounded. Forty-six Japanese bodies were recovered.²⁴

Thereafter, 5 Brigade passed through 6 Brigade positions and continued to maintain control over the Japanese line of communications to Thayettabin by air strikes, artillery and mortar barrages, and by extensive patrols. One such aspect of their domination was the clearing of 'Westdown', an important position located on the Thayettabin - Myohaung road. The Japanese, realizing that they had been out-maneuvered, tried to attack Westdown from the western slopes. But their attempt was nipped in the bud. 5 Brigade, to compensate for the shortage of artillery within the division, employed saturation bombing for three days beginning from the 29th to

the 31st of December. Afterwards, fighting patrols attacked the Japanese area on the western slopes.

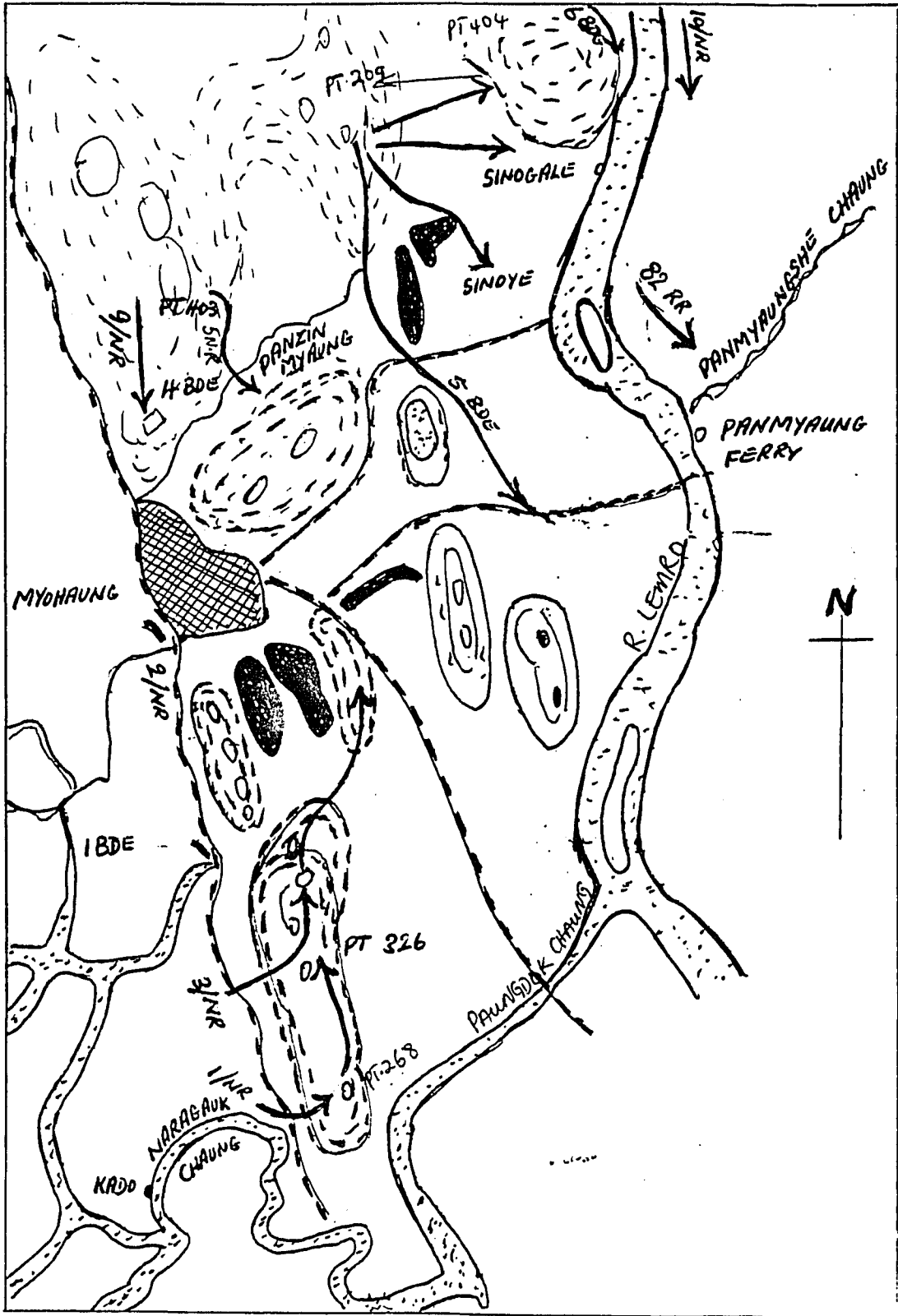
By 4th January, 81 Reconnaissance Regiment from Kyingri moved up to Apaukwa to join with the 82nd Division coming from Htizwe in preparation for the next objective in the Kaladan, Myohaung. The battle for Myohaung was important because it was here that the Japanese threw in two out of three battalions of their garrison force in Akyab, which opened the way for the easy allied capture of Akyab on 3rd January, 1945.²⁵ After Akyab and the capture of Myohaung, the fate of the Japanese was sealed in the Arakan.

Myohaung, the ancient capital of Arakan, was the site of the major engagement of the West African Force in the Kaladan. Myohaung had a couple of hill features and offered a good defense network. Myohaung was also important because, after the defeat of the Japanese at Westdown, they had retired towards Myohaung. The assault on the city was a two-pronged attack and marked the heaviest concentration of troops from the two West African divisions against one objective in the Kaladan. Myohaung was one last attempt by the Japanese to regroup. But it was at a time when they were in retreat on all fronts, and their lines of communication constantly threatened, and as such, supplies were not coming in with any regularity. Indeed, the agony of

defeat now stared them in the face. Nonetheless, the battle for Myohaung was a well-planned and well-executed military operation.

The capture of Myohaung and the establishment of a bridgehead over the Lemro River east or south-east of Myohaung was scheduled for the 25th of January, 1945.²⁶ The date was chosen so as to allow for the successful completion of the planned allied amphibious landings at Kangaw. Kangaw was another important town for Japanese operations in the Kaladan. Villages near the coast were part and parcel of Japanese military operations in the Arakan. As a result, after the loss of Akyab they were left with Myebon and Kangaw. Furthermore, they had appreciated that the decisive battles of 1945 would be in the Irrawaddy valley. Thus to protect the rear of the 15th Japanese Army they decided to build defences at Kangaw and Taungup.²⁷ But the XV Corps thinking annihilation and protection of allied landward advance on Rangoon on the Burma central front decided to land at Kangaw to seal a possible escape route, and also deny them access to the Irrawaddy valley.²⁸ As a result, therefore, the West African force capture of Myohaung and further advance plus the allied landings at Kangaw would encircle and destroy the Japanese forces in the Arakan.

The initial plan was for the 81st Division, after



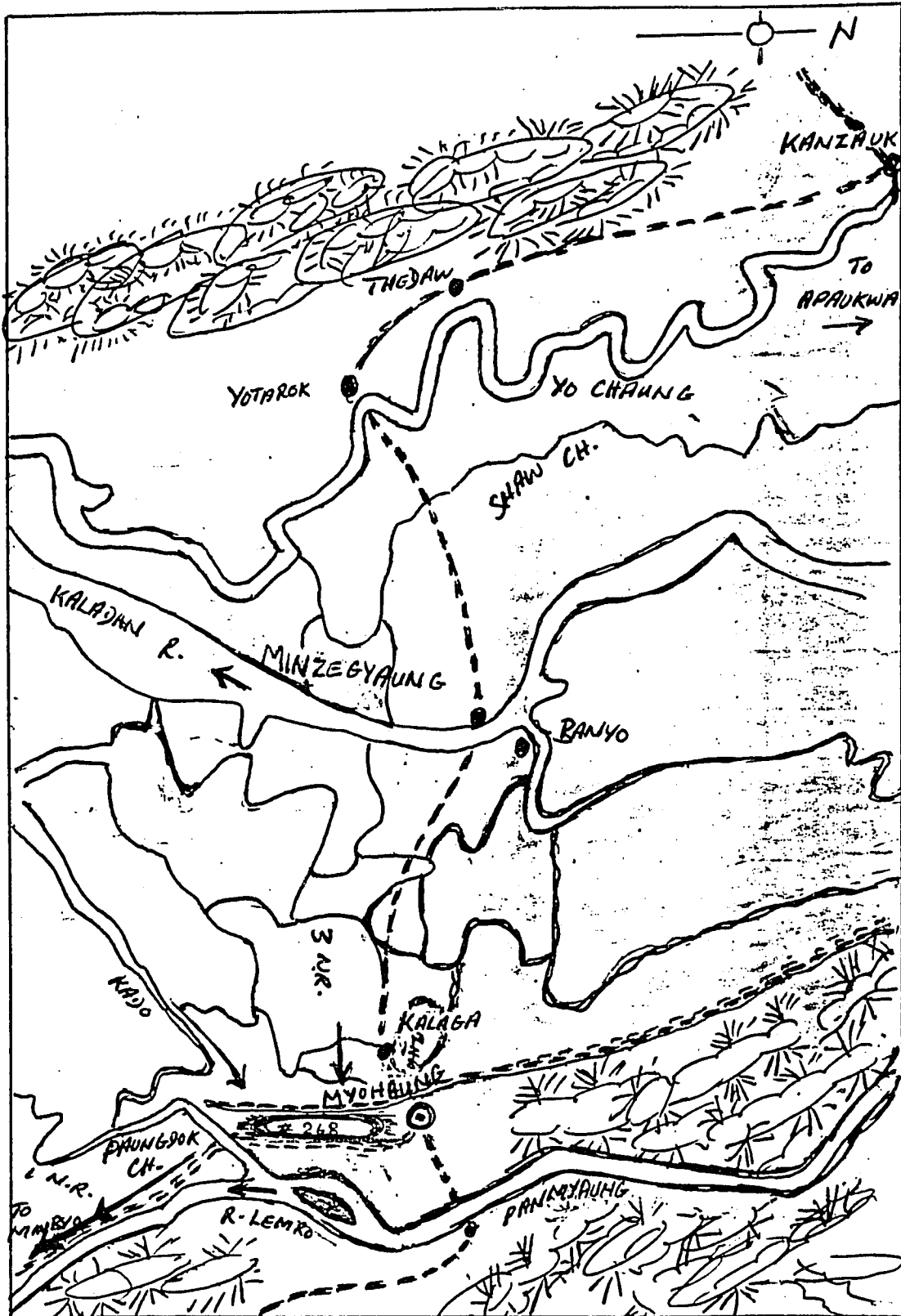
BATTLE OF MYOHAUNG, JANUARY 1945

dominating the general area Kyauktaw - Thayettabin - Teinnyo - Apaukwa, to be relieved by the 82nd Division. 4 Brigade of the 82nd Division was to carry out the first phase of the relief plan. Thereafter 1 and 2 Brigades would follow respectively. 2 Brigade position at Buthidaung was to be taken over by 22 (E.A.) Brigade. But in the meanwhile, 81st Division was so successful in its advance that the capture of Myohaung was possible and therefore became her main objective. Above all, with the destruction of the Japanese force figuring prominently on the minds of allied planners, it was considered necessary to take advantage of the 81st Division success to seal the Japanese escape route further south. The capture of Myohaung was now to be a two division effort. During this time Major General H.C. Stockwell replaced Major General Bruce evacuated sick.²⁹ But all the units for the operation would be under the command of the 81st Division.

The plan for the capture of Myohaung was four phased. The method of advance was along the hills between Ngashwe Myaung and on the main road Thayettabin - Myohaung. During phase one which would start around January 10, 1945, 6 Brigade would secure Point 555. There, they would construct a footbridge and mule crossings in the general area west of Makyaze over the nameless chaung running east from Yan Ch. The second phase would begin with 2 Brigade concentrating on

the hills east of Kyibyugyaung by 1600 hours on 8th January and, to be prepared to send at least one battalion to the area Pyainggya, to protect the 30 Mountain Regiment, and furthermore, to be ready on orders from Divisional Headquarters to move forward along the western edge to secure Thingyittaw Pagoda exploiting southwards to Point 403 and eastwards to Point 459. It was pointed out, however, that this forward movement should come after 6 Brigade had captured Point 555. Finally, 2 Brigade was to make muleable the track leading from Point 459 to Kyibyugyaung. On orders from the Divisional Headquarters phase three called for 5 Brigade to secure hills south of Myohaung up to the Lemro River. The final phase was for 4 Brigade to establish a bridgehead east of the Lemro River and thereafter carry out recce operations in the general area and linking up with Divisional Headquarters.³⁰

On 22nd January, the order for the clearing of the Japanese from the city of Myohaung and its contiguous area was received. The operation was to be carried out by 1, 4, 5 and 6 Brigades of the West African Force. The D-Day for the final close in on Myohaung was scheduled for the 24th of January. Myohaung is situated on a pass running east and west through the narrow foothills bordering the eastern side of the Kaladan valley. On the latitude of Thayettabin the foothills divide into several parallel ranges. Running south, these



1 (W.A.) BRIGADE OF THE 82nd (W.A.) DIVISION IN THE MYOHAUNG OPERATIONS

ranges drop off gradually as the Lemro and the Kaladan draw closer. About six miles north of where the ridges end, in the area of Paungdok and Naragauk Chaungs, lies Myohaung. Myohaung is immediately bordered by paddy fields and hills, ranging from about three to four hundred miles, and on the west side, it is bordered by approximately seven miles of paddy fields, intersected by chaungs and runs, which empty into the Kaladan River.³¹

Between the 22nd of January and D-Day, all the Brigades took their final objectives. 1 Brigade was on the ridge to the south of Myohaung. 5 Brigade had to capture the ridges east of Myohaung, between Myohaung and Panmyaung Ferry. 6 Brigade concentrated on the west bank of the river south of Payagyi. 4 Brigade concentrated on the ridge two miles north of Myohaung. On the night of the 23rd-24th January, D-Day, operations commenced. It was generally an offensive operation in a north to south direction. 4, 5 and 6 Brigades advanced from the north, pushing the Japanese back on Myohaung into the lap of 1 Brigade, forming a bridgehead to the south, and dominating the hills there. 4 Brigade simulated an attack north of Myohaung and at the same time supported by 82 (W.A.) artillery sent fighting patrols to secure the Japanese main positions north of Myohaung. But because its area of operations from the north was cushioned by 1 Brigade on the south, 4 Brigade did not carry out artillery or mortar

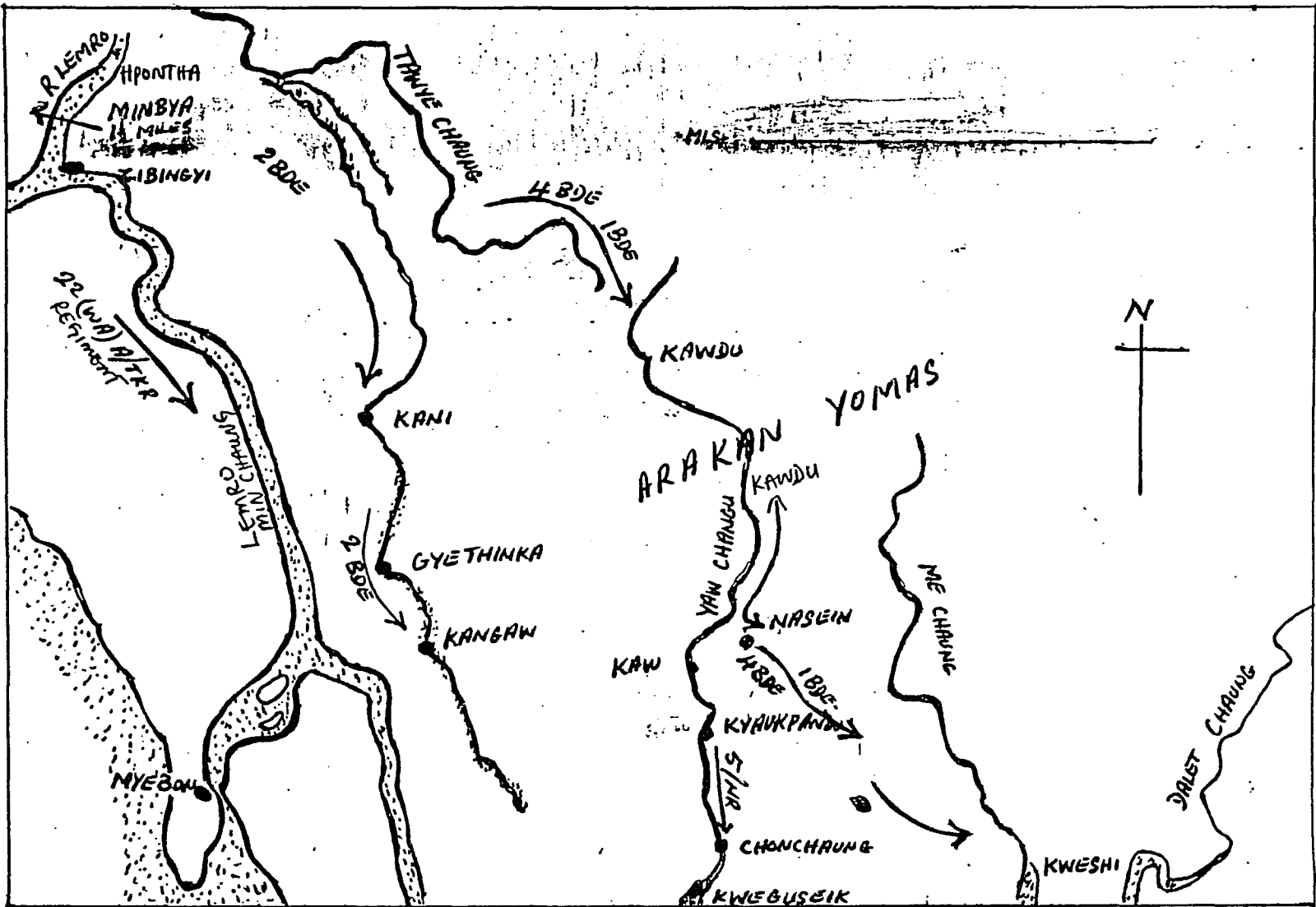
bombardments. But it is important to describe the efforts of 1, 2, 3 N.R. of 1 Brigade in the south. Immediately south of Myohaung 3 N.R. assaulted her position and occupied it without firing a shot. But further south it was an entirely different ballgame. Supported by 30 Mountain Regiment of Indian Artillery, 1 N.R. put together an excellent fire plan. Mortar, artillery and air strike supported the assault of B Company which was supported in turn by D Company. B Company dash and determination to secure Point 268 came right after bombing and strafing by Thunderbolts and the fine efforts of the artillery. D Company, exploiting northwards, linked up with 3 N.R. Although only eight Japanese dead were found, the garrison showed signs of hasty evacuation. The execution of the plan was a classic one of encirclement and annihilation. Japanese resistance was not organized or concentrated, but as usual their small pockets offered fierce resistance. Nonetheless, they were overwhelmed and on 25th January, Myohaung was captured. It was an occasion of joy for the West African Force.

The main reason why the Japanese did not fiercely contest Myohaung is not clear. What we know for sure is that on all fronts fortune was not favoring the Japanese and that might have had an effect on their will to resist the West African Force advance on Myohaung. It was also a fact that the Japanese Myohaung force, estimated to be about one

thousand strong, was no match for the twelve battalions of the West African Force.³² They were heavily out-numbered. Furthermore, as the Japanese acknowledged after the war, although they were surprised at the battle of Myohaung, they were not really intending to hold it for long except to cover the withdrawal of troops of their 55th Division further south from Arakan. Nevertheless, this operation suggested that the Japanese when overwhelmed, encircled, and denied supplies and reinforcement, were not likely to resist doggedly, thus calling into question the idea that, they always fought to the last man. Indeed, the idea of fighting to the last man is predicated on three factors: first, is when you have the materials to make war; secondly, if with the estimate of your resources you might be able to achieve battle field success or secure peace; and finally, when the army still has her line of communications open. As a result, therefore, it is wrong, as implied with the Japanese army, that they fought to the last man as a result of perhaps a special behavioral characteristic. In any event, at Myohaung, they were not totally destroyed because small parties managed to escape towards Minbya. It gave some concern to the authorities because in twentieth-century warfare a relatively small force with effective firepower can cause a serious havoc to a much larger force. But, realistically, the Japanese force was no longer to be reckoned with in the Kaladan.

The capture of Myohaung was historic because it was the first time the two West African Divisions fought side by side to carry an objective. But it was also the end of the campaign in Arakan for the 81st Division. The 81st had been in the first Kaladan campaign, they had operated on the Kalapanzin, and now they had contributed immensely to the second Kaladan campaign. In all, they saw setbacks and successes. But they came out more experienced. They proved their mettle in the Kaladan and returned to India for a well deserved rest, marching via Kanzauk - Buthidaung to Chiringa from where they were transported to India. In India, by the end of February, 34 Corps was formed for carrying out further operations after the expected allied capture of Rangoon. This Corp under Lt.Gen. O.L. Roberts consisted of 23 Indian Division, 3 Commando Brigade and the 81st (W.A.) Division. However, before this corp was to be employed, the Japanese surrendered and the war in Burma ended. Meanwhile, the rest of the clearing operations in South Arakan, the Kaladan, was now in the hands of the 82nd Division.

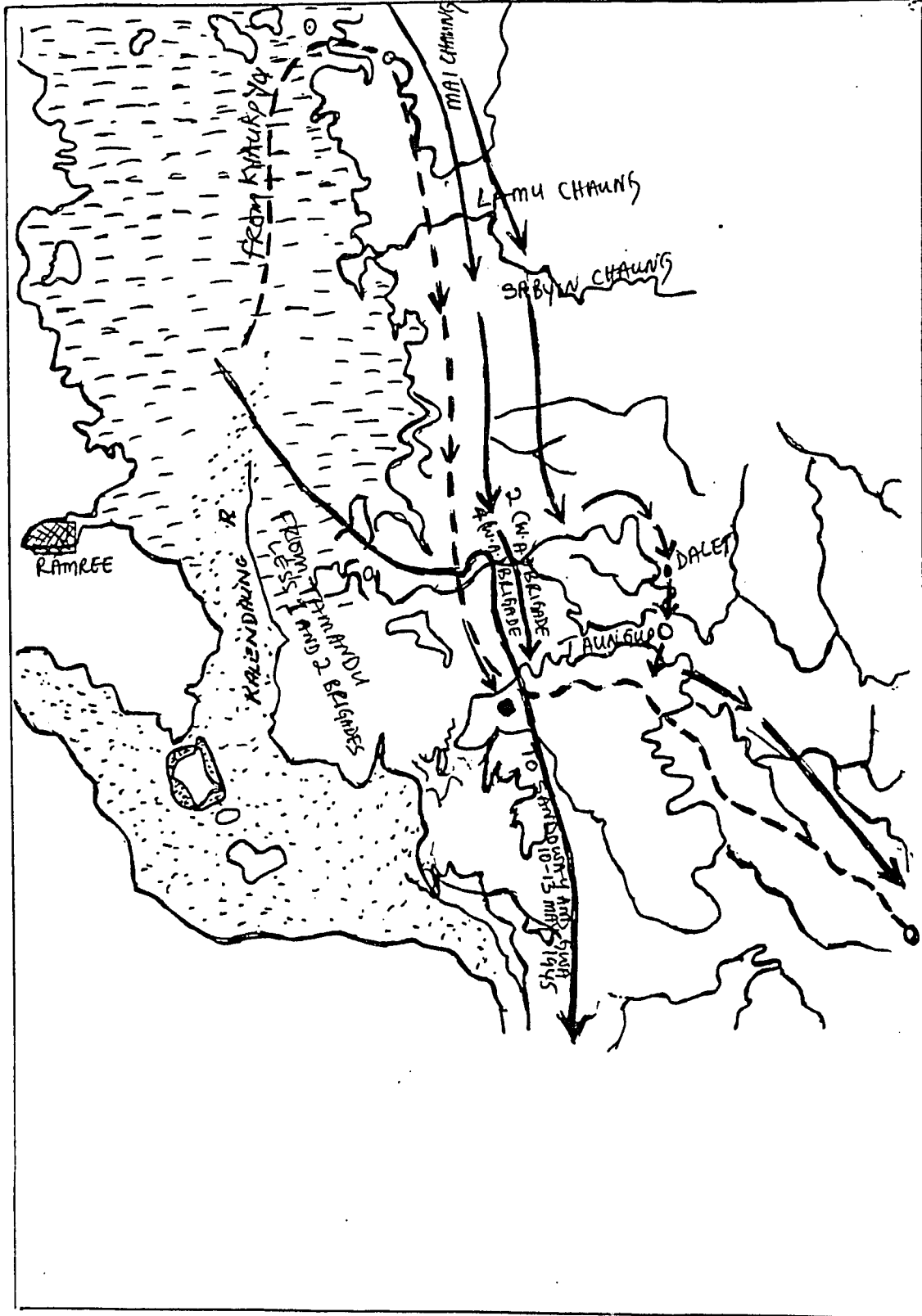
Before the capture of Myohaung, an allied amphibious force had landed at Kangaw on the 22nd of January, 1945. The landing at Kangaw was designed to seal the Japanese escape from Arakan across to the Irrawaddy where they might delay the operations of the Fourteenth Army advancing towards Rangoon. At Kangaw, fighting continued until the 30th of



OPERATIONS AFTER MYOHAUNG

January when the village was captured and a road-block established. After the battle of Myohaung, the 82nd Division advanced on the axis Hpontha - Kangaw and Hpontha - Kyweguseik. This landward drive further destroyed the enemy at Kangaw. But again they managed to escape in small numbers to the jungle covered hills to the east and west.

Meanwhile the divisional advance continued on the general axis Panmyaung-Daingtha-ThaleChaung-Hpontha with 2 and 4 Brigades leading. 4 Brigade with 1 Brigade in the wake advanced down the Mi Chaung area. 1 G.C.R. of 2 Brigade had the task of clearing the road Hpontha-Kani-Kangaw. While 2, 3 G.C.R. in parallel lines were clearing south and west flanks bordering 4 Brigade. 1 G.C.R. with 102 Light Regiment, 106 Battery, 42 Mortar Regiment and other battalion units under command and all called Coln "H" met incident on February 5, 1945. About thirty to forty Japanese attacked the units in the Obondong area of the advance. The Japanese were believed to be units either escaping 4 Brigade advance or detailed to challenge any movement in the Obondong area. Whatever it was, they were not successful and lost about fifteen soldiers killed or wounded and consequently fled westward. Kani was secured on the 9th of February. Thereafter, She-ywa was invested after capturing the normal products of a Japanese harbour position - maps, diaries, orders of battle and various machine guns.³³ So far the African soldiers were



OPERATIONS IN SOUTH ARAKAN, MARCH-APRIL-MAY, 1945

adequate for their task and admirable overall. Their bearing steady and fire control were excellent. Skill, initiative and gallantry had become their virtues.

Elsewhere, in the Arakan, the situation was getting critical for the allied forces. A major amphibious operation was about to be launched on Rangoon, and the whole of south Arakan needed to be cleared of any major Japanese threat. The success of this implicitly meant that it would be possible to release forces for other operations.³⁴ Furthermore, the Fourteenth Army was beginning her landward advance on Rangoon, and air bases were needed urgently at Akyab and Kyaukpyu to be within two hundred and fifty miles, the economic range of the Dakota (C-47), to be able to maintain the army. Finally, effort was to be made to block remnants of the harried Japanese 54th Division from using the An Pass to the lower Irrawaddy to reinforce the Japanese army opposing the Fourteenth Army landward drive on Rangoon. As a result of all this, operations of the 82nd Division were concentrated in clearing south Arakan of any organized Japanese force. This they did with the capture of Tamandu and all other operations on the Tamandu - An road. But a caveat has to be entered that these operations did not normally have the usual verve and vigor because of the lack of supplies and supply aircraft due to the demands on the Burma central front. Indeed XV Corps supply quota was

reduced from one hundred and thirty tons per day to thirty tons per day. It critically affected the 82nd division with regard to reinforcements, evacuation of casualties, war materiel and tactical air support. The resultant effect was that the planned encirclement of the 54 Japanese Division was now relegated to mere harassing operations.³⁵ But before this the enemy contested the ford area of Dalet Chaung and Dalet itself.

On February 26, with the rest of 1 Brigade already at Dalet a 2 N.R. patrol detailed to make contact with some left over units was fired and assaulted by Japanese soldiers. Three A.O.Rs. were killed and five wounded. The enemy had infiltrated, cut off the units across the chaung and bent on resisting any further crossing. 2 N.R. was therefore ordered back to clear the entire ford area. B and C Company operating in a dense bamboo jungle failed to make any major advance even after B Company had tried to flank left. The enemy was well sited and was firing from the front and rear. Due to the nature of the terrain it was not easy to get a good view of enemy positions atop the ridges. Attempts at creeping up her positions proved futile. D Company of 1 N.R. positioned athwart the ford sniped at enemy positions. It did not break ranks. Although the enemy numbers were not known, they were believed to be substantial and needed a well planned

operation. Since 1 Brigade was already overstretched 4 Brigade was called in to help the situation.

An attack to be led by 4 Brigade units was planned for 1100hrs of 1st March. The previous night 9 N.R. of 4 Brigade continued to harass the enemy. The operations, however, began with the dropping of oil bombs creating huge flames and dense smoke but not catching fire in the dense, green jungle. 9 N.R. despite the smoke cover failed to dislodge the enemy. Later in the afternoon, about five hundred shells were fired on another enemy position and followed by an assault by 10 N.R. also proved unsuccessful. Attacks upon attacks by 2, 9, 10 N.R. failed to make any major headway and patrols of 1 N.R. around Point 270 were increasingly attracting enemy fire. Further attacks were planned but later in the afternoon fresh directives for the entire south Arakan operations arrived. It meant the re-crossing of the Dalet Chaung and reduced offensive operations due to logistical problems, and the activities of the allied army advancing towards Rangoon.³⁶ By 3rd March most of 1 Brigade units, less 3 N.R. still on Big Contour at Dalet, had finished recrossing at a point west of the ford area being challenged by the Japanese. They were just sitting in defence without realizing what was going on around them.

Meanwhile, still athwart in Dalet area, 3 N.R. on 3rd March was ordered to throw a bridgehead across the Dalettaung Chaung in the contiguous area immediately south of Small and Big Contour. This was necessary because across the ford a track led to Letmauk where the next set of operations would take place. But 3 N.R. was unsuccessful due to enemy resistance from positions in the Small and Big Contours. Nevertheless, A Company of 2 N.R. managed to establish a bridgehead further west. 1 N.R. later passed through with minor engagements and became the advance force of the brigade on its way to Letmauk. But 3 N.R. had to find a way out and the Japanese positioned at Small and Big Contour had to be liquidated. B Company of 1 N.R. was called in. After some serious bombardment from mortar batteries, B Company with utmost elan charged on Small Contour. The Japanese were suprised but responded with rifle and automatic fire. Charging across open paddy suffered only five casualties, two A.O.Rs. killed, one B.O.Rs. killed and two A.O.Rs. wounded, as against twenty-six Japanese bodies recovered but total casualties estimated to be seventy-eight. About one hundred trenches were discovered with other Japanese dug-out paraphernalia. Elsewhere, other heroics were taking place. A detached platoon of A Company 1 N.R. resisted Japanese bayonet assaults on two pimples in the Dalet Chaung area on 6th March. The casualties were seven killed, with at least twenty Japanese dead. On Big Contour the situation was

slightly different.

On March 10, 3 N.R. feinted an attack on Big Contour from the north. Pausing intermittently, repeated mortar barrages and yells from the forward companies helped sell this ruse. But the main attack came from one Company of their Regiment from the west and backed by 104 Mortar Battery. The assault went on as planned and the African soldiers were in their element. But the offensive was called off about thirty yards before the objective. It was later understood that a British Officer, wounded in battle, called off the attack. It was lack of confidence in the African soldier even after all these months of campaigning successfully in the Arakan.³⁷ Nevertheless, the 3 N.R. and other supporting units broke out a track near the junction of the chaungs, over the hills and towards Phayonchaung and Shaukchon with the enemy bereft of this movement. A track which was discovered earlier by a patrol of 2 N.R. The Dalet experience was over.

For the Tamandu - An road operations, the GOC, Gen. Stockwell issued directives to his various brigades. 2 Brigade from Ru-Ywa was to form a firm base on the Letmauk - An road at the track junction four miles south-east of Letmauk. 1 Brigade was detailed to move on Letmauk and strike the road Tamandu - An and open the road between Letmauk and the firm base of 2 Brigade by the 7th of March. During this

operation the brigade would be supplied by air. 4 Brigade, with Divisional Headquarters, was to break off the engagement on the right bank of the Dalet Chaung, march to Tamandu and clear the Tamandu - Letmauk road for the maintenance of the Division. 30 Mountain Regiment and 82nd Reconnaissance Regiment was placed under their command.³⁸

In the ensuing operations the remainder of the Japanese force in the Kaladan still contested every inch of ground. The encirclement and relief of the 2nd Brigade in the Letmauk area merits full discussion. During these operations, as mentioned earlier, air supply was drastically reduced and the vagaries of the terrain (the densely covered mountainous country) limited the extent of operations. The lack of adequate air supply, did not make for a quick despatch of the remaining elements of the enemy in the Kaladan.

On March 9, 1 Brigade concentrated at Dalet, 4 Brigade withdrew from Dalet and concentrated at Kaditpin and 2 Brigade was about three miles south of Letmauk, in the vicinity of Gongon, where they set up a roadblock after destroying five enemy guns and two tankettes in hand-to-hand fighting.³⁹ Since Gongon was in a valley and surrounded by hills, and not easily defensible, the Brigade was advised to advance towards Letmauk. The Letmauk area was an important line of communication for the Japanese who were using it to

carry supplies. For the 2nd Brigade it was important because the rest of the division was located there and Letmauk had an air strip. But the threat to the Japanese was so important that the Japanese unit between Letmauk and 2 Brigade was reinforced. Two battalions of 111 Regiment of the Japanese 54th Division with all available tanks and artillery was detailed to pry open the roadblock. But as 2 Brigade left the roadblock and advanced towards Letmauk, they were surrounded and immobilised by the Japanese on the eastern slopes of the Shawbin Taung. Relief was not immediately available and the situation became critical. Casualties of the brigade could not be evacuated, and shortage of supplies, especially for the transport animals, began to be felt. What was more, a mortar shell hit the Brigade Headquarters, wounding the Commander, Brigadier E.W.D. Western, and his brigade major, and killed the G.S.O.3.40

4 Brigade, with 1 N.R. of 1 Brigade under command from the 16th of March, set out to their rescue. Around March 13, 4 Brigade, with other Brigade troops, was road-bound with 19 Sherman tanks, rarely used in the Kaladan because of the terrain. Their objective was Letmauk to unprise the locked 2nd Brigade. But their advance was slow due to thick bamboo covered hills and the enemy holding key defensive positions in the Letmauk chaung and Me chaung area, two miles short of their objective. The Sherman tanks were not very helpful.

The bamboo terrain necessitated that the tanks would be road-bound and thus susceptible to enemy 75mm guns which could be fired as close as forty yards. It was also the time of the year when the heavy Kaladan mists reduced visibility to a couple of yards for half of the day. Map reading was difficult and directing fire was well nigh impossible. In the limited action casualties were mounting. As 4 Brigade was bogged down unable to relieve the 2 Brigade, 1 Brigade at Dalet was detailed to carry out the relief effort.

By the 20th of March, with 1 N.R. reverting to its original command, they had concentrated at Letmauk. The 21st of March was taken to re-regroup. The initial action by the brigade was to secure the hills to the east -named Eton, Harrow, Brighton and Hove-, getting behind the enemy, and linking with 2 Brigade. But by the 22nd of March, no major success was achieved, as the Japanese contested the area vigorously. The effort was then directed to the south of the road and for this operation 22 (W.A.) Anti-Tank Regiment was placed under command of the Brigade. This was necessary not only for increased fire-power but also to challenge about thirty Japanese tanks in this area. The Japanese tanks were part of a plan, it was later learnt, scheduled for the 26th of March and designed to lure the West African Force on Letmauk for destruction.³⁸ From the beginning of the Kaladan operations the Japanese had been looking for a master stroke

to destroy the allied Kaladan force. But it had always eluded them. It is now necessary to discuss the operations of 1 Brigade.

On the 22nd of March, C Company of 1 N.R. captured point 838 and advanced towards the ridge leading to Okanyo In where they met resistance. The regiment was able to make progress down the ridge by employing smoke bombs and burning out the thick bamboo jungle. 3 N.R. advancing north-north east from point 838 secured the feature Camel without much opposition. They advanced towards another feature Starfish, which offered a good view of the feature Eton, after encountering and neutralizing various enemy patrols. Meanwhile 1 N.R. with one Company of 2 N.R. under command extended their base around point 838 thus rounding the northern end of the Okanyo In feature. Thereafter, 22 Anti-Tank Regiment continued towards Okanyo In without enemy resistance. A base for a path had been cut. Hence beyond Okanyo In the path was taken over by troops of 2nd Brigade. On March 25, the breakout began with casualties and mules leading the way. The enemy was blissfully unaware of the breakout and was still plastering point 838 with mortar fire. 41 1 Brigade, and indeed, 4 Brigade had essayed a passage for the encircled 2nd Brigade. To all intents and purposes the objective in the Kaladan had been achieved because any Japanese left west of An could not cross over to the central plain of Burma to significantly

interfere with the operations of the Fourteenth Army. Thus, two days after the change of direction, on the 24th of March, 1 Brigade was able to cut a path around Okanyo corridor - point 1269. After the Letmauk operations, the division less one brigade, was ordered to move to the general area Tanlwe - Taungup to destroy the enemy now withdrawing north towards An.

On 1st of April, 1 Brigade with 82 Reconnaissance Regiment, 1 light battery, 105 and 106 mortar batteries and 22 Anti-Tank Regiment were ordered to advance from Letmauk and contain the enemy east of An. The brigade from the 4th of April was maintained from Tamandu. Under command, the 22(E.A.) Brigade from Ru-Ywa, and 2 Brigade from Tamandu was ordered to move south by road. 4 Brigade, finally, was ordered to withdraw from Letmauk to Shaukchon as soon as Kunywa was cleared. The movements began immediately and smoothly except with the roadblock encountered by 2 Brigade on 12th April. A Japanese force working their way from the west established a roadblock near the positions 'Lion' and 'Tiger'. As a result, a small force known as the 'Canteen Commandos', from 2 and 7 Auxiliary Groups, 4(W.A.) Field Company and volunteers aided by an air strike neutralized the enemy force. By the 15th of April, the enemy bivouacked at Tamandu and Wetherby. 1 Brigade by the 13th of May occupied An and later left for Kindaunggyi for a well deserved rest.42

It has since become known that the operations of the 82nd Division went a long way in making the Japanese keep their troops west of the Yomas not only for security but also to cover a possible withdrawal.⁴³

The rest of the 82nd Division operations in the Taungup area looked toward containment and if possible destruction of the enemy force, and the clearing of south Arakan before the monsoon. The operations around Kerifi, Gongon, Shaukchon and Devonshire were defensive patrolling, not without its own heroics, yet limited due to lack of resources for major offensive operations and the needs of the other fronts. This was done by controlling the general line of the Prome road around Yebawgyi and consequently advancing to Prome, Sandoway and Gwa. The advance was successful and 2 Brigade established at Taungup, on 10th May, 4 Brigade was at Sandoway, 1 Brigade stationed at Kindaunggyi and on the 15th, 22(E.A.) Brigade entered Yebawgyi. These positions became their monsoon positions. During this period, there was no organized Japanese force in the Arakan country. Most had escaped, some were straggling, and others perished from starvation and disease. In September, 1945 the Japanese force officially surrendered in South East Asia.

The second Kaladan campaign was based on the military principles of maneuver, attempts at annihilation and,

effective containment. Surprise and mobility were the key to these operations. For all their success, especially Akyab and Myohaung, it appears they failed in their attempt to obliterate the Japanese in south Arakan. But the principle object implicit in their operations was to make sure that the Japanese force was not going to significantly affect allied operations on all fronts, which they did not. Thus it is fair to conclude that the campaign was a success.

In conclusion, the campaign in the Kaladan and the Kalapanzin sectors showed innovation on part of the allied forces, such as air supply and fighting in 'boxes', but no new tactics on the Japanese part. The campaign also places in question the belief that the Japanese soldier was a master of jungle warfare. What we have seen in these operations, was that the Japanese maintained their age-old, all-terrain tactics of infiltration, encirclement, flank hooks and roadblocks. There was nothing new. Indeed, the idea of the Japanese soldier as a master of jungle war stems from only one thing, the Japanese soldier was a brave and fanatical soldier, especially when not faced by an overwhelming opponent, and his lines of communication, or economic base for making war were intact.

From the onset, the Japanese objective in the Arakan was "to break the enemy's positive intentions to launch counter attacks along the coast of the Bengal Bay and at the same time to make a feint diversion for the main Imphal operation." They initially achieved some success. But, "owing to the lack of preparation for our (Japanese) supply to the front and to the underestimation of the enemy's capacity of supply by air, this operation was interrupted without accomplishing its object. This failure is presumed to be the cause of the following collapse of the defence of Burma."⁴⁴ But a few aspects of Japanese strategy and tactics

is puzzling. If their initial intention in introducing a force in the Kaladan was to affect their operations on the central front was Arakan, why did they not abandon the Kaladan when that effort was lost by February of 1944, and try to alter the central Burma operations by crossing the An Pass. Even in April of 1945, it has been ascertained, Lt.Gen. Miyazaki, Commander of Japanese 54th Division had a force of at least five thousand strong that could have been used earlier in the year to alter or seriously threaten the advance on Rangoon. It was not only poor strategic planning but also poor generalship to have forces sneaking around the jungles of the Kaladan. That aside, the Japanese had a supine understanding of the word patrol. When studies of the entire Burma campaign are completed it will be realized that most of their casualties came from patrols that lacked security and understanding of what they were doing. Perhaps it might be true that they failed in this role because of lack of initiative and poor training of the junior ranks.

For the West African soldier the conclusion is that if trained and well led, they might achieve any objective, even in a terrain like the Arakan where no commander would want to seek battle. But it also shows that jungle warfare is not a pre-ordained vocation of any particular people. It is a type of war, like any war, to be carried out by trained soldiers

without regard to nationality or country or continent of origin. Throughout the war, it was gallantry and offensive mindedness that accounted for the successes of the West African force. Indeed, the two tables in appendix 3 showing the casualties - the highest in XV Corps - and their military decorations, bespeaks of their gallantry. The Japanese testimony is worth noting: "The enemy soldiers are not from Britain but from Africa. Because of their belief they are not afraid to die, so even if their comrades have fallen they keep on advancing as if nothing had happened. They have an excellent physique and are very brave, so fighting against these soldiers is somewhat troublesome".⁴⁵ But two things are worth noting about the West African soldiers. First, the advantage of ethnic armies. The composition of the various regiments into various nationalities engendered a spirit of comradeship. Mentally and psychologically it powered them in achieving many feats in their operations and even without their European Officers they would have given a good account of themselves. Secondly, was their ability and savvy in crossing the many chaungs of the Kaladan like an amphibious division. Oftentimes equipped with Rangers (inflatable boats), Mark III and native rickety boats and canoes, these gallant Africans were able to cross these chaungs under heavy enemy fire.

Finally, a word will be appropriate on the Divisional leadership. The GOC for the 81st Division was initially Gen. Woolner and by the time of the second Kaladan campaign it was Gen. Loftus-Tottenham. It is often very hard to compare commanders because they generally do not have the same resources. Woolner and Tottenham both came from the same British military tradition of peripheral approach to military objectives. They were both competent. But Woolner appeared unaggressive. Apart from the Pagoda Hill affair, he did not preside over any major disaster. However, the way he dispersed his division units all over the Kaladan, and the fact that he accepted too many objectives given him by his corp headquarters, shows an indecisive leader. On the other hand, Loftus-Tottenham's speedy advance on Myohaung with the rather battle-fatigued 81st Division, when it was planned that the 82nd would carry out the operation, indicates a motivator and an aggressive leader. The concentration of the two divisions on Myohaung, however, helped make the capture of the city a splendid success.

The 82nd Division had Gen. Mc Bruce initially and later Gen.H.C. Stockwell. The two commanders enjoyed the dual advantage of experience - learning from the 81st, and having to combine with the 81st for the greater half of the second Kaladan campaign. But their success in clearing the Japanese force from South Arakan after the 81st was withdrawn shows a

well led division.

By early 1946, from India the West African Force began to embark for West Africa where they were warmly received. Back home, the African Colonial Force established solely for providing soldiers for the second World War was disbanded. Demobilization took place and the rest of the soldiers with their enhanced tradition reverted to the old Royal West African Frontier Force.

Footnotes

1. See Appendix 1.
2. _PRO,WO 173/642: 82nd Division Training Directive #1.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. _PRO,WO 173/996: Appendix A, Minutes of Conference of Area Commanders held at General Headquarters on March 7 and 8, 1944.
6. The 81st Division training did not elaborate on defence except with regard to concepts like 'holding a line or position'. See _PRO,WO 173/634: Appendix B, 81 Division Training Memorandum.
7. _PRO,WO 173/1002: Appendix I, Notes of Divisional Commanders Conference, 6 April, 1944.
8. Minutes of Meeting held at General Headquarters India, Box 98, RG 331, November 1, 1943, NA-SEAC War Diary.
9. _PRO,WO 172/6609: Appreciation by 82nd Division at Chas, November 1944.
10. George G. Giffard, Despatch on Operations in Assam and Burma from 23rd June, 1944 to 12th November, 1944, London Gazette, #39187, paragraph 80.
11. _PRO,WO 172/6609: Appreciation by 82nd Division at Chas, November 1944.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.443; PRO-WO 172/9614: Partial Report, Major Cooke, 2 N.R.; Brig. C.R.A. Swynerton, A Short History of the 1st (West African) Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, 1944-45, (Kakawa Press, Lagos, Nigeria) 1946, p.19.
16. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.435.

17. Ibid. pp.434-435.
18. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraph 354.
19. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp.436-437.
20. See captured diaries and prisoner of war documents in PRO,WO 208/46: The Japanese Camp in the Arakan.
21. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.437.
22. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraph 354.
23. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.438.
24. Ibid.
25. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraph 362.
26. PRO,WO 172/9547: 81 Division Operation Instruction #54, 5 January 1945.
27. Maj. Gen. Kirby S. Woodburn, The War Against Japan, Vol.iv, p.215.
28. Report to Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraphs 369.
29. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.447.
30. PRO,WO 172/9547: 81 Division Operation Instruction #54, 5 January 1945.
31. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.443-444.
32. PRO,WO 172/9547: 81 W.A. Division Operation Instruction #6, January 1945; For an additional account of the Myohaung Operations, see Brig.C.R.A. Swynerton, A Short History of the 1st (West African) Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, 1944-45, pp.29-30.
33. PRO,WO 172/9623: Report on Operations of Coln "H" 5 Feb. 45- 13 Feb.45, appendix 1.
34. George G. Giffard, Despatch on Operations in Assam and Burma from 23rd June, 1944 to 12th November, 1944, London Gazette # 39187, paragraphs 109-110.

35. Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, paragraph 415.
36. On ford area battles, see Brig. C.R.A. Swynerton, A Short History of the 1st (West African) Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, 1944-45, pp.41-44.
37. On Contour operations, see Ibid.pp.47-54.
38. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.458.
39. Brig. C.R.A. Swynerton, A Short History of the 1st (West African) Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, 1944-45, p.58.
40. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, pp. 463-464.
41. Brig.C.R.A. Swynerton, A Short History of the 1st (West African) Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, 1944-45, pp.55-63.
42. For general details on operations in the Tamandu-An area, see Maj. Gen. Kirby S. Woodburn, The War Against Japan, Vol. iv., pp.344-350.
43. Haywood and Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force, p.470.
44. PRO,WO 208/149: Field Marshal Count Terauchi's Official Report on Japanese Operations in Burma, 1943-45.
45. Brig.C.R.A. Swynerton, A Short History of the 1st (West African) Infantry Brigade in the Arakan, 1944-45, p.86.

Appendix 1

Order of Battle of the West African Divisions in Burma
1943-45

81st Division	82nd Division
5th (W.A.) Infantry Brigade	1st (W.A.) Infantry Brigade
5,7,8 Gold Coast Regiment	1, 2, 3, Nigeria Regiment
3 Auxiliary Group	5 Auxiliary Group
6th(W.A.) Infantry Brigade	2nd(W.A.) Infantry Brigade
4 Nigeria Regiment, 1 Sierra Leone Regiment, 1 Gambia Regiment	1, 2, 3 Gold Coast Regt.
4 Auxiliary Group	6 Auxiliary Group
3rd(W.A.) Infantry Brigade	4th(W.A.) Infantry Brigade
6, 7, 12, Nigeria Regt.	5, 9, 10 Nigeria Regt.
detached to Wingates Special Force	2 Auxiliary Group
Divisional Troops	Divisional Troops
81 Reconnaissance Regt.	82 Reconnaissance Regt.
101 Light Regt. 41 Mortar Regt.	102 Light Regt. 42 Mortar Regt.
21 Anti Tank Regt.	22 Anti-Tank Regt.
3,5,6 Field Companies	1, 2, 4 Field Companies
8 Field Park Company	9 Field Park Company
10 Divisional Survey Section	11 Divisional Survey Section
81 Divisional Signals	82 Divisional Signals
Ordnance Field Park	Ordnance Field Park
5,6 Field Ambulances	1, 2, 4 Field Ambulance
83 Field Hygiene Section	82 Field Hygiene Section
1001,1002,1006 Mobile Workshops	1003, 1004, 1005 Mobile Workshops
1010,1011,1012,1013,1014,1015	1016,1017,1018,1091,
Light Aid Detachments	1020,1021,1022 Light Aid Detachments
816, 817 Divisional Transport Companies, 1780,1781,1782	825, 836 Divisional Transport Companies, 1784, 1785, 1786, 1787,
Composite Platoons	Composite Platoons
1,4,8 Field Butchery Sections	26, 29 Field Butchery Sections
Divisional Pack Bullock Company	7 Auxiliary Group
1 Auxiliary Group	Divisional Postal Unit
Divisional Postal Unit	119 Field Cash Office
Divisional Salvage Unit	81 Field Security Section
108 Field Cash Office	276 Divisional Provost Company
6 Field Security Section	
275 Divisional Provost Company	
Divisional Base Forwarding Party	

Appendix 2

Command

81 West African Division	
Maj. Gen. C.G. Woolner, C.B., M.C.	16 Nov.43-14 Aug.44
Maj. Gen. F.J. Loftus-Tottenham, D.S.O.	24 Aug.44-28 Mar.46
5 West African Brigade	
Brig. E.H. Collins	16 Nov.43-16 Sept.44
Brig. P.J. Jeffreys, D.S.O., O.B.E.	16 Sept.44-28 Mar.46
6 West African Brigade	
Brig. J.W.A. Hayes, D.S.O.	16 Nov.43-13 Mar.44
Brig. R.N. Cartwright	26 Mar.44-1 July 44
Brig. A.A. Crook, D.S.O.	6 Aug.44-31 May 46
3 West African Brigade (under Special Force)	
Brig. A.H. Gillmore, O.B.E.	15 Feb.44-30 Nov.44
14 West African (A.A.) Brigade	
Brig. D.H.M. Carberry, M.C., D.F.C.	16 Nov.43-20 Nov.45
82nd West African Division	
Maj.Gen. G. Mcl I.S. Bruce, O.B.E., M.C.	16 Nov.43- 9 Feb.45
Maj. Gen.H.C. Stockwell, C.B.E., D.S.O.	9 Feb.45-22 May 45
Maj. Gen. C.R.A. Swynerton, D.S.O.	23 May 45-13 July 45
Maj. Gen. H.C. Stockwell, C.B.E., D.S.O.	14 July 45-28 May 46
1 West African Brigade	
Brig. C.R.A. Swynerton, D.S.O.	16 Nov.43-22 May 45
Brig. F.W. Clowes	23 May 45-13 July 45
Brig. C.R.A. Swynerton, D.S.O.	14 July 45-28 May 46
2 West African Brigade	
Brig. E.W.D. Western, D.S.O.	16 Nov.43-23 Mar. 45
Brig. A.T. Wilson-Brand	23 Mar.45- 5 Aug. 45
Brig. F.W. Clowes	5 Aug.45-28 April 46
4 West African Brigade	
Brig. H. Gibbons, M.C.	16 Nov.43-20 Oct. 44
Brig. A.H.G. Ricketts, D.S.O., O.B.E.	20 Oct.44-14 Aug. 45
Brig. N.C. Stockwell, C.B.E., D.S.O.	14 Aug.45-4 Dec. 45
Brig. A.H.G. Ricketts, D.S.O., C.B.E.	5 Dec.45-31 May 46
22 East African Brigade (under Command)	
Brig. R.F. Johnstone	1 June 44-19 May 46

Appendix 3

81st (W.A.) Div. (less one Brig.)	Casualties		Missing	Totals
	Killed	Wounded		
Officers	3	9	1	13
British (Other Ranks)	5	20	-	25
African (Other Ranks)	66	314	20	400
				<u>438</u>

82(W.A.) Div.				
Officers	29	94	2	125
British (Other Ranks)	19	61	1	81
African (Other Ranks)	428	1,417	34	1,879
				<u>2,085</u>

XV Corps Casualties including 25 (Indian) Div., 26 (Indian) Div., Corps Troops and 22 (E.A.) Brigade = 5,093. The numbers for 5 and 7 (Indian) that served briefly in the Arakan are not included. The Japanese casualties, however, are as follows:

Killed	3,950
Wounded	5,274
P.O.W.	129

Total	<u>9,353</u>
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It is important that these figures are not accurate. For instance, the enemy killed are actual counted bodies but it is assumed a lot were not seen or counted. The figures for the wounded are based on half times the number of counted dead.

Decorations and Honors

81st W.A. Div. up to January 1946 including 3 W.A. Brig.
under the Special Force

Awards	African	European
D.S.O.	-	11
Bar to D.S.O.	-	1
M.C.	-	28
Bar to M.C.	-	1
D.C.M.	5	5
M.M.	54	9
Total	<u>59</u>	<u>54</u>

Honors	African	European
C.B.E.	-	1
O.B.E.	-	7
M.B.E.	-	12
B.E.M.	3	3
Totals	<u>3</u>	<u>23</u>

82nd Division up to February 1946

Awards	African	European
D.S.O.	-	7
M.C.	-	21
Bar to M.C.	-	1
D.C.M.	4	3
M.M.	32	5
Total	<u>36</u>	<u>37</u>

Honors	African	European
C.B.E.	-	1
O.B.E.	-	4
M.B.E.	-	7
B.E.M.	2	-
Total	<u>2</u>	<u>12</u>

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The following are saddled with war propoganda but they served as the mouthpiece for the West African Soldiers fighting in Burma especially about their welfare.

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