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ACSC Report 86-2580 (88 pages)



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TITLE 1ST AIR COMMANDO GROUP
Any Place, Any Time, Anywhere

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
requirements for graduation.

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE
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PREFACE

The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old one out.

B. H. Liddle Hart (9:190)

This work examines the 1st Air Commando Group of World War II--an experiment looking toward future air warfare. Employed in the China-Burma-India Theater, the organization made military history by conducting the first all-aerial invasion--Operation THURSDAY. Because of more glamorous campaigns in Europe and the Pacific, THURSDAY and the 1st Air Commandos have been generally overlooked by military historians. This study calls attention to that lost piece of airpower history; however, it is not a definitive work. That undertaking would be enormous considering the group never published a unit history, instead adopting the theme: "To hell with the paper work, go out and fight." Therefore, this account focuses on the circumstances which brought about the requirement for and the employment of the 1st Air Commando Group in Burma during the Spring of 1944. An unorthodox strategy in aerial warfare, the group serves as a model organization for use in unconventional conflicts today.

The primary impetus for this study of the 1st Air Commando Group is my father, Fred H. Van Wagner. He joined the air commandos after their deployment to India but before Operation THURSDAY. Greatly influenced by the events and camaraderie experienced in India, he passed on these values and philosophy to me. This study has been worth far more than the time spent; it has helped me to know my father better. Therefore, with warmth and love, I dedicate my research project to him.

This study would not have been possible without the help of many former members of the 1st Air Commando Group. I am grateful to Gen John R. Alison, co-commander of the unit, for his contribution and participation. I hold a great respect for him and the accomplishments of his organization. I was also aided by the men of the 1st Air Commando Association. Particularly, I wish to express my appreciation to the association secretary, Robert Moist, for his time and information. Additionally, interviews with Arthur Burrell; Frank Clifford; Joseph Cochran; Lemuel Davis; John Derdak; Thomas Doherty; Patrick Driscoll; Dr. Cortez Enloe; Paul Forcey; Allen Hall, Jr.; Neville Hogan; John Hyland; Felix

CONTINUED

Lockman, Jr.; Joseph Lysowski; Stamford Robertson; Raymond Ruksas; Lloyd Samp; Howard Smith; Tom Taketa; Vincent Ulery; and F. H. Van Wagner provided invaluable insights. Their responses to my questions and enthusiastic support of this endeavor were an inspiration.

Equally important to my work was the assistance of organizations and people at Maxwell AFB. I am indebted to the personnel of the USAF Historical Research Center, Herb Huie of the Graphic Arts organization, and to the Photographic Shop. I would like to formally thank my advisor, Lt Col Gregory, for his encouragement, technical assistance, and advice. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not also thank the members of my family for their patience and understanding during this task. Many kind people have helped and encouraged me in writing this account; I thank them all.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major R. D. Van Wagner graduated from Texas Tech University in 1969 with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in Advertising. He was commissioned from Officer Training School in April 1971 and finished Undergraduate Navigator Training at Mather AFB in 1972. In his follow-on assignment to C-141 Starlifters at Norton AFB, he upgraded to Select Lead Airdrop Navigator and Flight Examiner. While at Norton, he completed programs with the USAF Audio Visual Service which led to the award of an AFSC in Television Production. Transferred to Mather AFB in 1975, he worked in the Trainer Systems Division developing software modifications to the T45 Navigator Simulator. In 1979, he completed a Masters degree in Systems Management from the University of Southern California just in time to be sent to the Military Airlift Command Aircrew Training Center at Altus AFB. There he served as a classroom instructor, curriculum developer, and Chief of C-141 Navigator Training. Three years later, he was selected for the Air Force Institute of Technology Education with Industry program. After a tour with IBM in the Quality Assurance option, he transferred to Kelly AFB in a career broadening assignment as a contract negotiator.

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Introduction

THE 1ST AIR COMMANDO GROUP

Broadway

It's just a field covered with buffalo grass, in the midst of a jungle where it has slept for countless years under the Burmese sun. Marked on no map, it was unknown and nameless until the necessities of war gave it sudden importance.

Then one night many men in gliders slipped like mammoth eagles down through the hazy moonlight, making history in aerial warfare and giving to it the name of "Broadway Burma."

For many of these men this spot was the end of the road; but now there is little to suggest the madness of that first night or the horror of succeeding nights and days.

A mass of twisted metal, rusting and half covered by the jungle growth...and a deep hole, now partly healed with buffalo grass, marks accurately the spot where many died.

It's sacred now, this once worthless ground like many other "Broadways" with other names. But the buffalo grass will grow, and the jungle will creep in and cover the carved panel, and the wooden cross will rot. And slowly it will be again worthless ground--unless we remember.

-Paul L. Bissell
Lt Col, USAAF (33:9-10)

The question of "why?" is answered by an analysis of the Japanese desire to use Burma as a wedge, a springboard, and a shield (44:4). By appealing to all of these desires, Burma promised to be a vitally strategic trophy.

In accordance with the 1927 Tanaka Memorial, Japan had annexed Manchuria in 1931, and in 1937, had begun a systematic march on China's major cities of Peking, Tientsin, Shanghai, Nanking, and Hankow. When finished, most of China was effectively cut off from the outer world. By 1941, the Japanese had fundamentally closed the door on China, but resistance was soon being met with the help of a supply line, the Burma Road, that extended from India through Burma to the small mountain town of Kunming in the Yunnan province of China.



Fig. 2 The Burma Road

As they looked at Burma, the Japanese strategists saw a wedge--a way to stop China's flow of munitions, equipment, and provisions (43:1673). The deep mountains provided a natural barrier to conclusively seal off China and starve her into submission. With Burma occupied, the Japanese could stabilize China and release the Nippon continental forces for other potential conquests (44:4).

The Chinese element may have been the impetus for the invasion, but Japan saw other strategic prizes in Burma. As well as establishing a road-block for Chinese supplies, Burma also could become the springboard for an offensive into the riches of India. The Japanese sensed an opportunity to take

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advantage of civil unrest, stirred by India's Mohandas K. Gandhi, to absorb the greatest British colony in Asia (27:258-259). If Japan invaded, they anticipated the support of the Indian population to chase the British out of India.

India was indeed a prize worth having, as great, if not more so, than China itself. World War I had given a stimulus to commercialization in India; in 1941 she offered an economy with burgeoning industrial capability. Production of coal and cotton had begun before 1920, but since that time, the iron and steel, arms and munition, and chemical industries had emerged with gusto (15:52-59).

Most important though was the Japanese grand strategy to overrun India and link up with a planned German push in Persia under the command of German General Erwin Rommel (44:4). Burma was the way to people, industry, and a possible strategic union; indeed the very idea of Burma brought a gleam of covetousness to the eyes of the Japanese generals.

As a pivot point, Burma offered China and India, but Burma, by itself, also beckoned to the Japanese. Three reasons are given--rice, natural resources, and natural defense. In 1940, the mainstay of Burma's internal and external economy was rice, almost 12,000,000 acres were under cultivation. To Japan, Burma represented a "rice bowl" capable of producing nearly 8,000,000 tons of this staple crop. Japan felt Burma's export of 3,000,000 tons of rice could be rechannelled to their already overextended Imperial Army (6:185-186). Additionally, Burma offered an abundance of natural resources, primarily oil and manganese. Finally, a Japanese-occupied Burma would act as a barrier or shield for the entire Far East territory (44:4). Japanese occupation of Burma would put too much distance between the Allies and Japan's new possessions of the Philippines, French Indochina, Thailand, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies.

For the question of "why?" there was plenty of rationale. With so many reasons to invade--China, India, and Burma's food and natural resources, the unknown question of the Burmese defense plans waited to be answered. The only way to find out was to try, and that the Japanese decided to do in earnest when the new year, 1942, rolled around.

There were three factors which comprised the British defensive scheme. Collectively the Japanese had to overcome them all. They were as follows:

- (1) The impact of Burma's rugged geography,
- (2) The effect of the Burmese climatic conditions, and
- (3) The preparedness of Burma's defense (44:2-3).

Separately they posed no appreciable problem, but together, each contributed to a viable British plan for the defense of Burma against the Japanese invasion.

Geographically speaking, Burma resembled a waterfall. All the natural elements which composed Burma parallel each other running from north to south--the mountains, the rivers, the roads, her central plain, her valleys and even the railway. Consequently travel in Burma from east to west was an enterprise contrary to the rules of nature. Burma's sudden and irregular mountains isolated one valley from another. The roads connecting these valleys snaked across the mountains and progress was always slow (14:141). Additionally, the mountainsides were covered with jungles thick enough to form a natural canopy. Hiding beneath this umbrella were leeches, malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and diseases by the score.

It was, therefore, obvious for the British to assume that an invader would be confined to the meager road system, railroads, or the great rivers. If given a choice, travellers generally used the waterways because Burma possessed two major and three smaller river systems. The largest river, the Irrawaddy, flowed swiftly down the center of the country and was joined from the northwest by the next largest in size, the Chindwin. Together these two mammoth rivers provided over 15,000 miles of navigable waters to the near geographic center of Burma (45:28).

Because of the north/south topography of Burma, choke points--the confluence of rivers, roads and railroads--were commonplace. Herein was the defensive strength of Burma. Under the circumstances, the British felt secure the Japanese could be held at bay by a relatively small force taking advantage of the natural contours and configuration of the land.

The British also felt time was on their side in Burma because of the recurring monsoons. Rain! Probably the most dominant feature of Burma was the monsoons. Lasting from mid-May until late October, the monsoons limited all military operations to the dry season. Rainfalls varied from about 200 inches in the area of Rangoon, 100 inches in the Irrawaddy Delta, 80 inches in the hills, and up to 45 inches in the dry zone of North Central Burma (45:5). The effect of the rain was not only the ankle deep mud and mire, but also the enervating monotony of the incessant downpour. The British hoped topography would slow down the Japanese enough so the monsoons could deliver the knockout punch. Key to British success was their ability to hold out until mid-May; this key was in the hand of General Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of British Forces, India.

When the military responsibility for Burma was transferred from Singapore to India on 12 December 1941, Gen Wavell was greatly concerned by the extent of unpreparedness in Burma's

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defense. He did concede, however, it was understandable because Burma was protected from sea invasion by Singapore and from land attack by three friendly neighbors. As long as Singapore, Thailand, Indochina, and India remained strong, there was no need for a buildup in Burma (43:1667-1668).

This dependence on regional stability was reinforced by the fact the Burmese Army had only been activated since April 1937. By late 1941, Burma had two British infantry battalions, two Indian infantry brigades, eight battalions of Burma Rifles, four mountain artillery batteries, and the equivalent of six battalions of the Burma Frontier Force. The latter mostly worked under the control of the Civil Power and had little fighting value (43:1667-1669). The forces available for the defense of Burma were only partially trained and almost without artillery, signal equipment, and anti-aircraft weapons (7:Map 127). The air force was plainly non-existent. It consisted of one fighter squadron equipped with Brewster Buffaloes (43:1668).

To assist in the defense of Burma, an offer by China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, complicated by the Chinese demand for separate lines of communication, was finally accepted by Gen Wavell. It must be stated, however, that "Britain...had little respect for China's military capacity." (26:235)

Lacking equipment, aircraft, manpower, and training, the military was clearly the weak link in the Burma defense plan. Gen Wavell counted on India for possible reinforcements and was beginning to mobilize for Burma's defense when Japan dropped its first bombs on Rangoon (43:1668-1671).

For Gen Wavell and India Command the combination of two factors, terrain and national defense, was hoped to be sufficient to impede the Japanese until the monsoons. Gen Wavell felt that when the operation resumed again in late October, he would have a sufficiently strong army in place to resist the Japanese. In matter of fact, Gen Wavell's hope proved to be groundless. His forces could not even hold out until mid-May.

In systematic fashion, the Japanese Army attacked first the weakest link in the military infrastructure of Burma, established air superiority, and then raced against the monsoons to overtake the British and Chinese Armies (43:1670-1675). The complete story of the Battle of Burma cannot possibly be undertaken here, but a brief synopsis of the events will establish the situation and provide a frame of reference.

Before ever dropping a bomb or setting foot on Burma soil, the Japanese plan for the Southeast Asia region foreshadowed the demise of the British in Burma. The first step in their plan, the occupation of Thailand, was accomplished after only eight hours of fighting. By December 1941, they converged their resources on

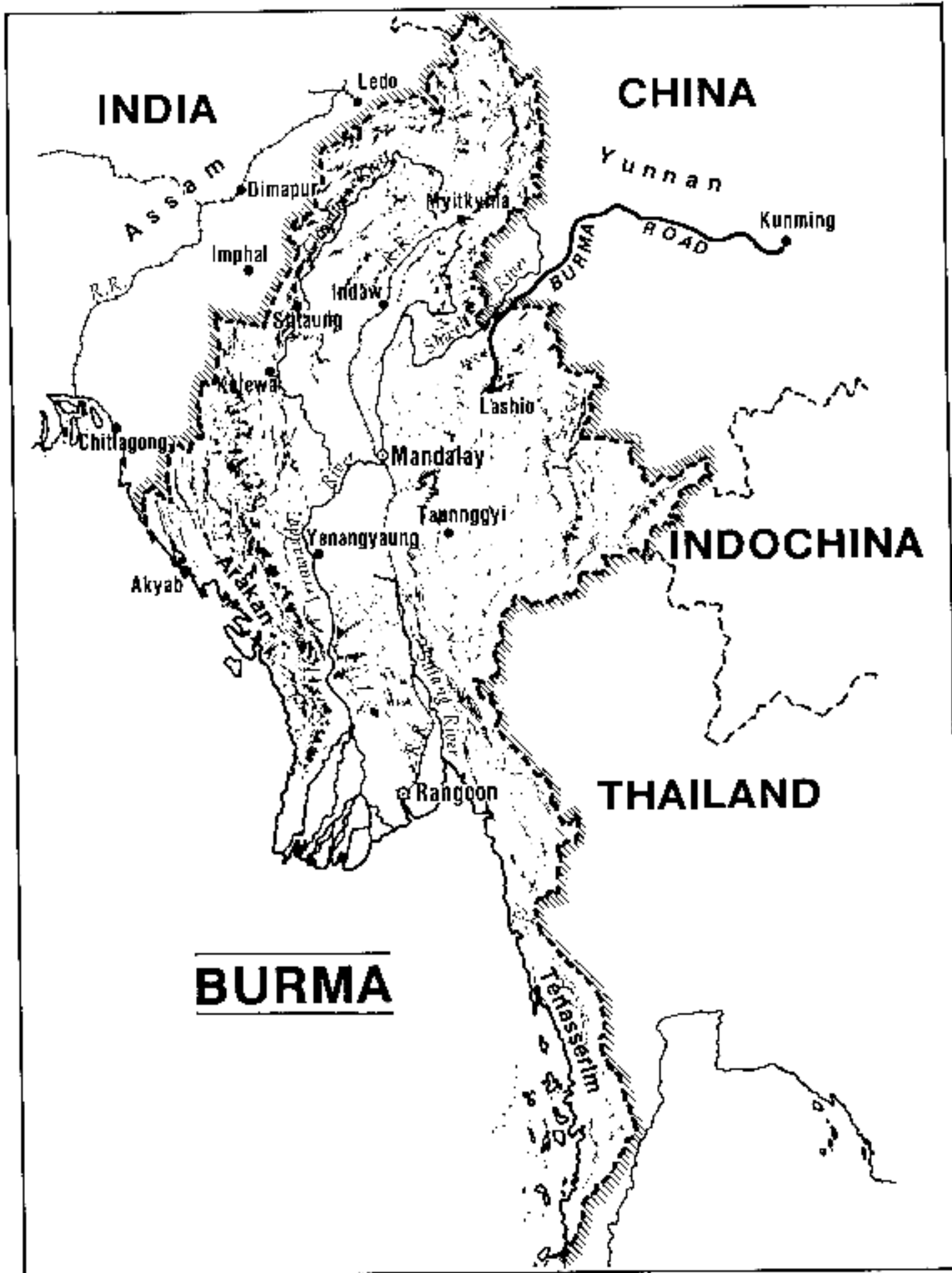


Fig. 3 Burma

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As the monsoon season started in 1942, the Japanese juggernaut had run the King's Own from the rice paddies and teakwood forests of Burma. Japan had cut the overland road to China, she had fortified her land conquests to the east of Burma, and India lay temptingly to the west. The Japanese had overcome all of the defensive obstacles of Burma within the time limits of the impending monsoons. The British had failed to realize the advantages of the bush; to the contrary, the Japanese had employed them to perfection. Now the Japanese used the natural barriers of Burma to establish her defense. The Japanese were thus firmly entrenched in Burma; her troops were fanned out in a border defense that effectively barricaded the door to Southeast Asia.

For the defeated British troops, there was despair; not only because of the humiliating trek back to India, but also for the memory of encounters in the deep, dark primeval rain forests. As related in one soldier's account:

Unlike the campaigns in Italy and Normandy...the very nature of the country in Burma dictated that brutal hand-to-hand clashes decided the outcome of countless encounters. Gloomily we sensed that, inevitably, our future lay in the jungles of Burma and our nightmares contained grinning Japanese, ready to open fire at us from cunningly concealed ambush positions. It was to take a considerable time before we ceased to think of the Japanese soldier as a superman, ten feet tall ... (22:10,12).

But even as the last stragglers of the British Army returned to India, a former artillery officer was already studying the contours, rivers, jungles, and situation in Burma to answer the challenge of Gen Stilwell. To mount an offensive, he would have to overcome the terrain, fear, and organizational malaise shown during the Japanese conquest of Burma. Recognizing these factors, this lone figure's unorthodox mind began to scheme and conceive of a bold and unprecedented operation. His plan would ultimately plant the seed for the formulation of a totally new concept in military history. To take back the wedge, springboard, and shield, he would have to beat the Japanese at their own game (38:1).

Chapter Two

WINGATE'S PLAN: THE INCOMPLETE SOLUTION



Fig. 4 Orde C. Wingate

As soon as British Col Orde C. Wingate arrived in India on 19 March 1942, he, by visiting the Burmese front and flying over the countryside, plunged into an intense and comprehensive evaluation of the situation (32:112). Col Wingate quickly began studying the training and tactics of the Japanese, the religion and customs of Burma and Japan, the climate and topography, and every available report on Japanese fighting in Burma (18:32). He agreed with India Command's assessment; the invincible Chin Hills and Japanese troop emplacements prevented a standard frontal attack. Contrary to commonly held beliefs though, Wingate felt strongly the British soldier could equal the Japanese in the rain forests because of the attribute of imagination.

To overcome the enemy's stranglehold on Burma, Col Wingate theorized the enemy should never know British intentions or strength. Additionally, he felt the British army should present the Japanese with unconventional situations whenever possible (6:138). Slowly he constructed the concept of Long-Range Penetration (LRP) in his mind. At first just a collection of ideas, later Wingate talked incessantly about organizing a force to employ hit-and-run tactics well behind Japanese lines in Burma.

Although there were many disbelievers on India Command's staff, Col Wingate's ideas caught the imagination of Gen Alexander. Gen Alexander instructed him to complete the plan; however, because it was innovative and unconventional, LRP actually evolved in stages. To understand the development, an examination of the conception, execution, and evolution stages is dictated.

During his 1942 study of Burma, Wingate concluded although the combination of Burma's wilderness and Japanese perimeter defense could not be assaulted head on, they still were exploitable. Noting Imperial troops were strung out with only a thin supply line connecting them to the interior, Col Wingate proposed an offensive to weaken Japan's grip on Burma based on three principles:

- (1) The light concentration of Japanese troops in the core of Burma,
- (2) Use of surprise and mobility, and
- (3) Employment of aerial firepower and resupply.

Simply stated, Wingate's theory of LRP was to place highly mobile forces in the enemy's rear to harass Japanese lines of communication and destroy supplies. Reminiscent of Confederate Lt Gen Nathan Bedford Forrest's raids during the American War Between the States, Col Wingate proposed an offensive based on the indirect approach. Crucial to his operation would be maneuver; therefore, resupply and artillery were to be provided by air power (31:41).

The Japanese defensive posture after the 1942 offensive pointed to the soft underbelly of the dragon. Wingate stated the enemy was most vulnerable far behind the front where Japanese troops were of inferior quality. Here, he reasoned, a small force could wreak havoc out of all proportion to its number (24:367-368). The size and composition of each group would vary with condition, the governing principle being strength enough to cause damage yet small enough to slip through the enemy's net. Operations and movements would be conducted during the day; if dispersed, rendezvous would always be made after dark.

The successful consequence of LRP would be widespread confusion and uncertainty behind the enemy's forward areas, leading to progressive weakening and misdirection of the Japanese main forces (41:1). Col Wingate insisted LRP units were not to fight on the front lines and must be used only in conjunction with a major offensive (27:62-74). If a major offensive did not occur, LRP would focus, not redirect, the Japanese forces and the small LRP bands would be annihilated by the full force of the Nippon troops.

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LRP units were not strong enough to withstand the main force; their great strength emerged from mobility. LRP groups would strike, disappear, and turn up somewhere else without the enemy being able to follow their movements through the jungle. The choice of engagement would be dictated by the commander of the LRP group with the objective of LRP being to hit the confluence of supply and communication lines (27:62-74). If LRP units struck a railroad bridge at dawn and a supply dump in the afternoon, the Japanese would be unable to guess the true strength of the columns and probably overestimate their numbers. Furthermore, if two LRP units worked in unison, they could utterly confuse the enemy. Wingate wrote, "Long-Range Penetration affords greater opportunity of mystifying and misleading the enemy than any other form of warfare." (41:1) At the root of Col Wingate's theory of penetration was the value of one fighting man deep in the heart of enemy territory.

Col Wingate further theorized the only limit to the number of fighting men and length of their operations was the availability of supplies. He called this the air support factor. LRP theory proposed air power be used in two ways:

- (1) As a flexible supply line and
- (2) As airborne artillery and tanks (27:142-147).

This departure from recognized methods of warfare called for the use of portable communications to maintain contact with base camps and detached columns. Wingate could not rely on normal supply lines, so as he colorfully stated, "Have no Lines of Communication on the jungle floor. Bring in the goods like Father Christmas, down the chimney." (8:164) The dropping of supplies was nothing new, nevertheless, the degree of accuracy required did present problems. For this reason, he requested Royal Air Force (RAF) flying officers be assigned to each ground unit to direct aircraft to drop zones and to mark targets in forward areas.

This notion was complicated and time consuming because RAF procedures did not allow direct outside communication with British pilots. Further limiting the effectiveness was the lack of British air superiority over Burma (5:461). Even with this drawback and the complex communication scheme, the plan was submitted to Gen Alexander and forwarded to India Command.

Despite the audacity of the strategy, Gen Wavell supported the plan totally. He included it as a part of a coordinated offensive called ANAKIM. The fulcrum of the plan called for the capture of the airfield at Akyab Island. From Akyab, the British could increase the security of the Bay of Bengal, thereby relieving the pressure on Burma and China from the Japanese Navy and Air Force. If this security could be realized, Gen Wavell felt the reconquest of all of Burma was possible.

The details of the ANAKIM plan involved coordination among a variety of military units, British and Chinese. The plan was as follows:

- (1) In mid-October 1942, 15th Corps would mount an offensive into the Arakan region to recapture the port of Akyab;
- (2) Amphibious strikes at strategic points along the Arakan coast would supplement 15th Corps offensive;
- (3) Ultimately joining forces, the amphibious units and 15th Corps would continue their attack to Rangoon;
- (4) In late January 1943, 4th Corps, commanded by Lt Gen A. F. P. Christison, would launch an assault on the Burmese towns of Sittaung and Kalewa;
- (5) The Chinese Rangarh Force under Gen Stilwell would move south to engage the Japanese at Myitkyina, Bhamo, and Lashio; and
- (6) The LRP group would infiltrate the central portion of Burma to confuse and disrupt Japanese lines of communication (24:384; 11:2).

Col Wingate's role in the plan would help secure Northern Burma from the Japanese. As the British advanced, a new road from Ledo would be built to connect with the Burma Road, thus reopening the supply line to China (19:229).

To seal his support of Wingate's plan, in June Gen Wavell established the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade expressly for LRP and promoted Col Wingate to Brigadier General (18:32). In July, assembled in the jungle country around Saugor, Gen Wingate began preparing his troops for the mission to come. His command, certainly not handpicked men, consisted of the following units:

- (1) 13th Kings Liverpool Regiment
- (2) 3/2nd Gurkha Rifles
- (3) 142nd Commando Company
- (4) 2nd Burma Rifles
- (5) Mule transport company
- (6) RAF liaison officers
- (7) Officers from the Bush Warfare School at Maymao, Burma (27:63).

Little did Wingate know as he assembled his troops that he would be forced to alter his original mission. Because of the continuing disunity within Gen Wavell's command, Gen Wingate would execute his plan without the primary requirement of LRP--the support of a major offensive.

As Wingate prepared to turn a defeated army into jungle fighters, he devised training methods that were physical, exacting, and thorough. The regime was described by one of the officers as follows: "Every movement, from stand to stand, was

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done at the double...When he [Wingate] wished to move to another viewpoint, he ran there, and jolly fast too." (24:376)

At first, the strain of the intensive training program took its toll. Before, during, and after the monsoons, Gen Wingate's men were swimming rivers, marching long miles, navigating through the jungle, climbing trees, and scaling hills. Within two months, up to 70 percent of the troops were in the hospital with real and imaginary cases of malaria, dysentery, and jungle sores (3:35-40). Wingate's reaction was severe but logical. He instituted strict punishments for imaginary illnesses. Further, he eliminated hospital excuses by having all officers instructed on the treatment of illnesses. He reasoned in the jungle, there would be no hospitals and very few medics (27:72-73). The cure slowly showed results as the men hardened under the discipline.

In addition to physical preparedness, Gen Wingate also trained his men in LRP principles; he did this by extensively using a technique called Tactical Exercises without Troops. Normally this involved sand tables modeled into miniature terrain maps. Wingate, insisting on extreme detail, had huge 400-square-yard pits dug so that all enemy troop strengths, as well as pertinent hills, rivers, roads, and gun emplacements, could be depicted to scale. For hours, the officers practiced a spectrum of scenarios envisioned by Gen Wingate: ambush, attack in position, attack while moving a column, use of light artillery, air resupply methods, and dispersion/rendezvous procedures (18:32-36).

Most importantly, he taught his soldiers the security and shelter of the jungle. He demonstrated with maps and aerial photographs that closeness to the enemy did not automatically mean contact. Rather than an enemy, Wingate proposed that the jungle, at the least, was neutral.

Just prior to the scheduled offensive in January 1943, Gen Wingate moved his men forward by hiking 133 miles from the railhead in Dimapur to Imphal. During this march, Wingate administered the last operational test. Departing without rations, he arranged for supplies to be dropped to his columns at prearranged sites after dark (3:38-43). After an 8-day march, he bivouacked outside the town of Imphal, still requiring the brigade to attend long and concentrated lectures. These classroom exercises proved necessary as Gen Wingate's mission was markedly changing even at this late date.

Little by little, the fabric of ANAKIM unravelled, leaving only the 77th Indian Brigade as a participant. First, in late October 1942, Gen Wavell recommended ANAKIM be moved back to November 1943 and a more modest plan be substituted. The new plan, called RAVENOUS, did not include an amphibious operation

and it only sought to retake Northern Burma (19:232). Next, 4th Corps cancelled its operation in the Ledo area because of transportation and roadmaking material shortages (24:382). Then, Generalissimo Chaing Kai-shek joined the parade by refusing to participate and withdrew the commitment of his Chinese forces to the operation (5:460).

To make matters worse, in late January 1943, 15th Corps encountered stiff Japanese opposition in the Arakan and stalled. They were never able to advance further and were subsequently driven back! (1:241-243; 46:32-34) In view of the facts, Field Marshall Wavell (DOR:1 January 1943) decided to disband the LRP forces and thus terminate the last vestiges of the operation.

To Field Marshall Wavell's surprise, Gen Wingate resisted. Although the primary prerequisite of a coordinated major offensive was lacking, Wingate argued for an opportunity to test his plan. After prolonged discussions, Field Marshall Wavell finally agreed to a new expedition named Operation LONGCLOTH. In allowing Gen Wingate's excursion, Field Marshall Wavell let stand the specific tasks of the RAVENOUS plan. The goals given Wingate and his men were as follows:

- (1) To cut the main railway line between Mandalay and Myitkyina,
- (2) To harass the Shwebo area, and
- (3) If possible, cross the Irrawaddy River and sever the railway between Mandalay and Lashio (10:309-310).

After two days of intense planning, Gen Wingate was ready to test LRP principles in actual combat against the Japanese.

A chronology of Operation LONGCLOTH demonstrated the astuteness of Wingate's LRP principles in action. Between 8-10 February, nearly 3,000 men crossed the Chindwin River into Burma (24:388). Unable to cover much distance in the dense undergrowth of the jungle, the columns moved slowly toward the railroad lines near Shwebo. Based on RAF liaison officer inputs, clearings were selected along the way for air drops. On 24, 25, and 26 February, the first series of drops were accomplished (24:395). The results were satisfactory although response time was predictably long.

Shortly after the first airdrops, the brigade's reliance on wireless communications was shown when two of Gen Wingate's columns were ambushed and lost their radios. Without means of communication, the commanders had no other choice than to return to India (24:398-399).

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did not get the organizational support necessary for complete victory. LRP was never intended to be the primary, let alone sole, operation; its value was to divide the attention of the enemy. Operation LONGCLOTH simply violated its own principles and the Japanese were finally able to corral the operation and pick it apart. What Gen Wingate did not foresee was the most devastating weakness; his inability to evacuate the wounded had a grave effect on morale. The later events of the operation did not detract from the mission's overall value though. For the first time, British troops had fought a jungle war against the Japanese and had delivered punishment. In Wingate's words, "a weapon has been found which may well prove a counter to the obstinate but unimaginative courage of the Japanese soldier." (46:24)

On 21 May, the London Daily Times released the invasion story for world-wide dissemination. During this report, the name Chindit was given to the 77th Indian Brigade. Gen Wingate explained the term described a mythological beast, half-lion and half-griffin. Portrayed as statues which guard Burmese pagodas, the lion-griffin symbolized to Wingate the unique cooperation required between ground and air forces (18:19). The description captured the imagination of Englishmen around the globe. The British press was extremely favorable in its treatment of the Chindits; their success contrasted sharply with the failure of 15th Corps' Arakan operation. Because of the publicity, Gen Wingate became the British champion of Burma (27:93).



Fig. 6 Chindit: Derivative of Burmese Chinthe

Additionally, the exploits of the Chindits fired the hope and praise of the Allies (6:149). A look at the circumstances and effect of the mission shows its impact on future Burma operations.

Prior to the Chindit mission, US and British planners had been at loggerheads about Burma. Since the Japanese had closed all overland supply routes to China in early 1942, US air power, flying over the Himalayas, kept provisions of fuel and materiel flowing into Chiang Kai-shek. However, increased Japanese actions required more stores than feasible using the "Hump" resupply method. US planners realized that if China was unable to hold out against the 20-odd Japanese divisions on their mainland, these experienced units could be released to fight elsewhere in the Pacific (13:6). US President Roosevelt, considering China a cornerstone in the war against Japan, wanted the Burma Road reopened.

Britain's Prime Minister Churchill, on the other hand, was more concerned with maintaining the British Empire. Because China had territorial claims on Northern Burma, Churchill wanted a weak China to emerge from the war (26:369-370). Based on these two interconnected priorities, the Prime Minister was not interested in relieving China's supply problems. Britain consistently recommended an amphibious assault in Sumatra with a push toward the recapture of Singapore.

President Roosevelt's trump card was to tie US demands for a Burma offensive to Britain's greatest need, war machinery. The inability of Britain to demonstrate a successful strategy to resecure the Burma Road had been a source of embarrassment to Churchill and his planning staff. To pump some life into India Command, the Prime Minister's staff was proposing the establishment of Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) to coordinate the complex interlocking and overlapping areas of command, geography, and operations (26:383). A new organization, however, was not a strategy. When he witnessed the press reaction to the Chindits, Churchill realized he had a new means of surmounting the topographic defenses of Burma and a new champion in Gen Wingate.

In July, Churchill called Wingate back to London to discuss the Chindit LRP operations. After speaking to Gen Wingate, the Prime Minister invited him to attend the upcoming Quadrant Conference in Quebec, Canada. The purpose of Quadrant was to establish overall Allied strategy, and although it primarily dealt with the European Theater, operations in Burma were to be discussed.

Specifically, Churchill wanted Wingate "to explain his recent operation with a long-range penetration group and to set out his views on their future employment." (41:1) During the

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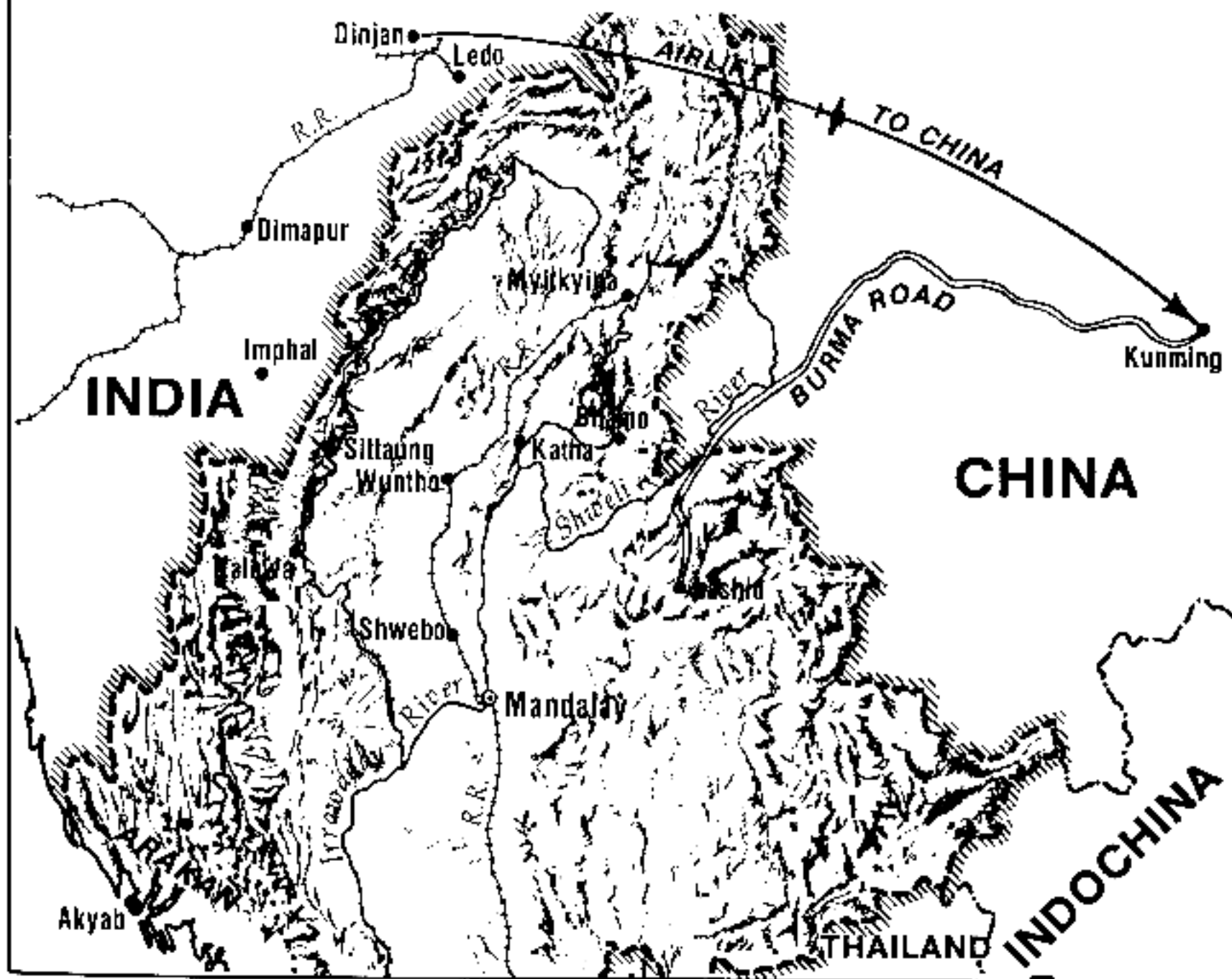


Fig. 5 Northern Burma 1943

Even with these losses, by 6 March the 77th Indian Brigade had blown up more than 75 sections of the Mandalay-Myitkyina railroad between Shwebo and Wuntho. Field Marshall Wavell's first two tasks were accomplished according to plan and with very little loss of personnel. The Irrawaddy River was now between Wingate and the successful completion of Operation LONGCLOTH.

When Gen Wingate crossed the Irrawaddy, he obliquely proved many of the premises of LRP; in doing so, he almost lost his brigade. With the activity around Shwebo, the Japanese were now fully aware of 77th Indian Brigade's position and turned their full attention on them. The Japanese slowly established a pincer movement that drove Wingate toward an area where the Shweli River formed a loop. Herded into the apex of a triangle with the river on two sides, the force was weakened by the RAF's inability to keep up air resupply (24:412-424).

India Command responded by recommending Gen Wingate terminate the operation and return to India; Wingate concurred without hesitation. His men had reached the point of exhaustion, were no longer receiving supplies, and had begun eating pack mules, snakes, and rats. Casualties had also become a major problem. Unable to keep up with the rapidly moving columns, injured men were often left at Burmese villages or under the shade of a tree with nothing more than a canteen of water, a rifle, and, sometimes, the Bible (64:--). To withdraw the rest of his troops, Gen Wingate had no options; he recrossed the Irrawaddy River on the night of 27 March (24:418-419).

Unable to shake his Japanese pursuers, Wingate finally issued the order for the force to form dispersion groups and work their way back to India or China. The escape worked as diagrammed despite Japanese constant harassment (27:54-94). One group, led by Maj Walter P. Scott, even enticed a C-47 into landing in a small jungle clearing and airlifting 17 wounded soldiers to safety (30:23-24).

Not all the others were so lucky. Operation LONGCLOTH lasted from 8 February until early June; of the 3,000 who entered Burma, only 2,182 returned to India but most were unfit for future combat (10:324). Notwithstanding these heavy losses and despite suffering from exhaustion, when the 77th Indian Brigade finally reached safety in India their spirits were high (6:140).

Gen Wingate's troops had reason to feel good about Operation LONGCLOTH. The mission had dealt a blow to the Japanese and proved a number of elements of LRP theory. LRP was actually able to exploit Japanese weaknesses in the interior of Burma; the successful raids on the railroads amply demonstrated this fact. Secondly, LRP's mobility and surprise had confused the Japanese for nearly two months. It was only when air resupply was unable to respond quickly enough to Wingate's needs that the mission broke down. Because of similarly slow responses, the brigades never exploited the firepower aspect of the theory.

Gen Wingate's operation brought to light the strengths and weaknesses of LRP operations. Wingate had overcome Burma's terrain and the residual fear from the Japanese invasion, but he

conference, Gen Wingate proposed to expand the number of units in steps to eight brigade groups for the forthcoming 1943-44 dry season offensive. Four of the units would lead the operation while four would be held in reserve. Wingate felt LRP units should only be subjected to combat for 90-day periods before being relieved for a rest. In addition to LRP units, a major offensive would be mounted with the following objectives:

- (1) The occupation of Bhamo and Lashio,
- (2) The occupation of Katha-Indaw airfield and a drive toward Pinlebu and Kalewa, and
- (3) An assault from Ledo toward Myitkina.

Gen Wingate's fortified LRP groups would act in coordination with British and Chinese forces whose overall objective was limited to the conquest of Burma north of the 23rd Parallel (41:1).

Gen Wingate's Quadrant plan also included requirements for aircraft support. He asked for approximately 16 DC-3 aircraft for airdrop and an allotment of one bomber squadron per unit for close air support (41:2). Additionally, at the insistence of one of his RAF liaison officers, Squadron Leader Robert "Tommy" Thompson, Gen Wingate sought to overcome previous morale problems by requesting a "Light Plane Force" to assist in the evacuation of wounded LRP personnel (34:8). The US reaction to a plan to reopen the Burma Road was viewed favorably.

While offering Wingate's LRP plan to secure Northern Burma, the British were forced to request American assistance. With the constant demands on war materiel in Europe, the British supply capability was overcommitted resulting in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater having the lowest priority in the war. Food was a critical item and equipment, such as weapons, vehicles, planes, and medicine, was always in short supply (21:140-154). Britain simply could not meet all the demands of Gen Wingate's Quadrant plan. Prime Minister Churchill felt that England had the necessary bombers, but he was unable to provide the following requirements:

- (1) Two LRP brigades,
- (2) The DC-3 Dakotas, and
- (3) The evacuation aircraft.

At the Quadrant Conference, the Prime Minister had Gen Wingate brief President Roosevelt; then when he had the President's agreement on the mission, Churchill followed up the briefing with a request for American men and materiel.

The President indorsed Wingate's bold strategy and forwarded Churchill's petition for help through channels. The request for aircraft went to US General of the Army Henry H. (Hap) Arnold for action. Because of Arnold's experience with airpower, his fertile

mind saw more in the plan than simple light airplanes. Like Churchill, Arnold wanted to put new life in the CBI Theater because he felt the previous campaigns had sapped the will of the British ground troops. In his mind, Arnold saw an opportunity to exploit and expand airpower. He became determined to form a new air organization which would be totally dedicated to supporting Wingate's troops on the ground in Burma (56:143,149). The successful realization of that strategy rested in Arnold's choice of a commander to breathe life into his vision.

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Chapter Three

1ST AIR COMMANDO GROUP: THE TOOL

On 26 August 1943, newly named Supreme Allied Commander of SEAC, British Adm Lord Louis Mountbatten met with Gen Arnold to discussed plans for the CBI Theater. During this discussion, Adm Mountbatten reportedly brought up the idea of enlarging on Gen Wingate's mission (27:246). Gen Arnold restated his support of LRP and committed his plan to develop an autonomous organization for this purpose. Gen Arnold's conception of this new force was as a highly mobile fighting unit complete with its own transportation and services. It would be an experiment looking toward future air warfare (61:1). As the unit evolved, it would change names five times. The evolution was as follows:

- (1) Project 9,
- (2) Project CA 281,
- (3) 5318th Provisional Unit (Air),
- (4) No. 1 Air Commando Force, and
- (5) 1st Air Commando Group (62:November/December 1983:6).

Arnold's first priority was to find men who would infuse the US "can-do" spirit into the CBI Theater. Having formed other "specials" and monitored their operations, Gen Arnold had concerns. Too often he had seen theater organizations absorb these unique forces, causing them to fail their purpose. Therefore, the selection of commander was critical as he would ultimately decide the composition, morale, and employment of the unit. Gen Arnold requested members of his staff nominate candidates for command of this experimental organization; five nominations were finally submitted. In a short period of time, the search narrowed to two individuals (56:143-144).

The first, Lt Col Philip G. Cochran, fit Gen Arnold's desired qualities; he was confident, aggressive, imaginative, and had a highly distinguished war record as a fighter pilot in Africa. In November 1942, then-Maj Cochran had led a group of 35 replacement pilots and planes to North Africa. Informed that casualties were lighter than expected, Cochran determined his men were not needed. Without headquarters sanction, he took the

leader, and possessed an innovative mind. By contrast, Alison was disciplined, articulate, a quiet leader, and had demonstrated a diplomatic demeanor. Unable to make a clear selection, Gen Arnold explained the details of the project separately to Cochran and Alison. After the operation was outlined, each man stated his opposition, thinking of it only as a light plane evacuation organization. Playing "Alphonse and Gaston," each tried to persuade Gen Arnold to give the job to the other (56:144-147).

Gen Arnold solved the problem by naming them co-commanders, adding that there was more to the project than met the eye. Gen Arnold said, "I not only want you to [take out the wounded] ... but I want the USAAF to spearhead General Wingate's operation." (42:3) Gen Arnold then terminated the session by saying, "To hell with the paper work, go out and fight." (28:130) Perhaps not intending them to take him literally, Cochran and Alison did just that after setting up offices in the Ray-Adams House, a Washington hotel.

Trying to better understand LRP and the mission of the new unit, Lt Col Cochran immediately flew to England to talk to Adm Mountbatten and Gen Wingate (56:152). During discussions about the previous campaign and long-range penetration theory, Cochran began to formulate the organization of Gen Arnold's vision, known at the time as Project 9.

After talking with Wingate, Cochran enlarged his concept of the mission of Project 9. Based on the 1943 Chindit campaign and focusing on the LRP principle of air support, Cochran and Alison decided to take on the responsibility for all of Wingate's air requirements. They began "building a whole small region of warfare where we had ground troops, artillery, infantry, air-ground support, fighter support, and bombardment support." (56:157-158)

There was no table of organization for a unit of this kind, so Cochran and Alison used their imagination to determine the structure and personnel requirements. They were able to get what they wanted because "Gen Arnold had given them practically carte blanche orders to gather men and materiel under the highest priority." (60:1) Among the first personnel assignments to Project 9 were Maj Samson Smith as Executive Officer; Maj Arvid E. Olson, a former AVG pilot, as Operations Officer; and Capt Charles L. Engelhardt as Administrative Assistant (48:4). The Project 9 group then launched into manning the unit. Due to the classification of the project, interested personnel were told only a minimum amount of information. Not advised of the destination, applicants were assured the mission included combat, the time period involved would be no more than six months, all who joined would be volunteers, and personnel should expect no promotions. At the Quadrant Conference, the RAF had agreed to

supply the bomber requirement; therefore, the co-commanders were seeking volunteers for three major types of aircraft--fighters, transports, and light planes.

To provide air support to LRP units, Cochran and Alison proposed an assault force of fighters. The fighter section, working directly with the Chindits, would fully test Wingate's theory of airborne artillery. The lure of combat duty and the secret nature of Project 9 made recruiting simple. Cochran said, "[W]e were allowed to bring in from anywhere--if we knew [a] man's name, we'd send for him. We knew them through our time in the Air Force." (56:161) Cochran and Alison selected Maj Grant Mahony to lead the fighter section. He had combat experience throughout the Pacific, was an ace (five kills), and had flown with Lt Col Alison in China. Maj Robert T. Smith, also an ace (eight kills) and a former AVG pilot, was selected as his deputy. After the unit was deployed to India, Maj Robert L. Petit, winner of a Silver Star for air battles at Guadalcanal, replaced Maj Smith (36:179-180; 66:--). As pilots were brought into the unit, they recommended others. Crew chiefs and enlisted men who had previously served under the leaders were asked to join the unit.

For aircraft, Project 9 recommended P-38 Lightnings for the close air support requirements (60:2). When this request was denied, the co-commanders substituted P-47 Thunderbolts and requested an allocation of 30 aircraft (41:Memorandum from Arnold to Marshall).

For the transport requirements, Cochran and Alison determined a need for three separate units. They decided to recruit pilots for transport, glider, and light-cargo airplanes. Each would fill a distinct role in the organization.

The mission of the transport section was to provide responsive airland and airdrop support for the Chindits. Maj William T. Cherry, Jr., pilot of E. V. (Eddie) Rickenbacker's ill-fated Pacific trip, was selected to command this section. Capt Jacob B. Sartz, who earlier had bombed the Japanese from a C-47 and flew 72 refugees on the last transport out of Rangoon in 1942, was chosen to be his deputy (36:179-180; 60:1).

To fully support the Chindits, Cochran proposed the use of gliders to transport heavy artillery to LRP units; Alison, likewise, saw the potential for gliders to resupply Wingate by moving men and equipment into small jungle clearings which could not otherwise be accessed (56:158). At the recommendation of the Pentagon, Capt William H. Taylor, Jr. and 1Lt Vincent Rose were respectively selected Glider Section commander and deputy. Once assigned, Capt Taylor hand-picked all glider pilots and mechanics for the unit from Bowman Field in Louisville, Kentucky (43:1).

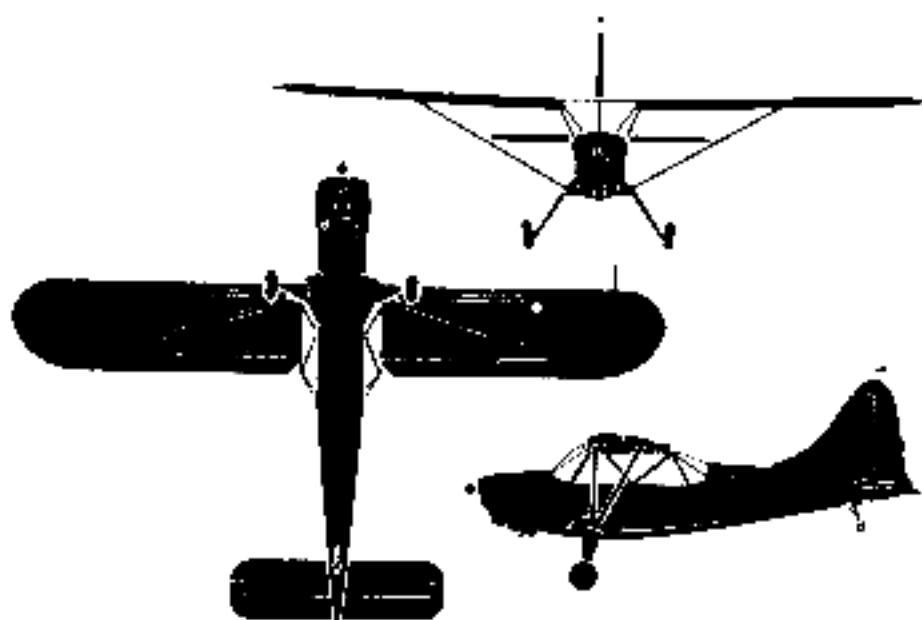


Fig. 13 L-5 Sentinel

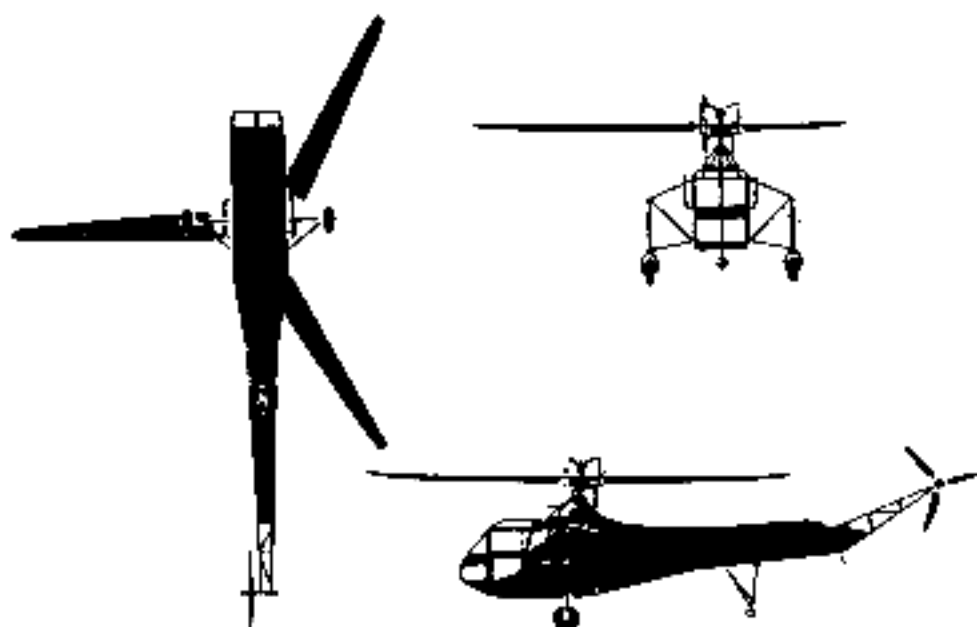


Fig. 14 YR-4 Helicopter

stretchers behind the pilot and had a short takeoff roll. Maj Rebori required 100 L-1 Vigilants; however, when the number of serviceable aircraft could not be located, he augmented the L-1 with the newer L-5 Sentinel (60:2). The Sentinels were faster than the L-1; however, they were designed to seat only one to two evacuees. The L-5 was also less desired because it required a much longer runway--about 900 feet (48:6).

In addition to the light planes, Cochran and Alison decided to employ the newly developed helicopter in Burma. Cochran placed the diplomatic Alison in charge of securing the pre-production model YR-4 for rescue service in the jungle. Although he was initially turned down, Alison finally persuaded Wright Field to send a technical representative to India to test four of Sikorsky's unproven helicopters in actual combat (63:--).

The organization, insofar as equipment was concerned, was equal to an USAAF wing carrying a normal complement of about 2,000 men (60:2). Because of time constraints though, Project 9 personnel had to be completely air transported. Therefore, the requirements--including medical, supply, engineering, intelligence, and communication sections--were kept lean: 87 officers and 436 enlisted men (41:Memorandum from Gen Arnold to Gen Marshall, 13 September 1943).

Lt Col Cochran and Lt Col Alison sent their planned organization through channels to Gen Arnold who forwarded his approval to General of the Army George Marshall on 13 September 1943. The only alteration to the request involved the fighters;

P-51A Mustangs were substituted for the Thunderbolts. In less than 30 days, Cochran and Alison had built themselves a unit and gotten it approved! Their next job was to imbue the unit with life and prepare the personnel for deployment.

As the unit formed, the men seemed to sense they were exceptional and began acting accordingly (56:172-175). Gathering in North Carolina on 1 October--the fighters and gliders at Seymour-Johnson Field and the light planes at Raleigh-Durham--Project 9 began requisitioning specialized equipment. New ideas were encouraged. As a result, a new mobile hospital was included on the required equipment list and blueprints for experimental rocket tubes were ordered from Wright Field for the fighters. The Dakotas were to be equipped with the newest development in glider towing, a reel for airborne aircraft to "snatch" gliders off the ground (60:2). For the gliders, Capt Taylor requested each Waco be equipped with gyro towing devices somewhat similar to an automatic pilot mechanism (37:2). Furthermore, Maj Rebori designed bomb racks so parachute packs could be mounted on the wings of L-1 and L-5 aircraft (48:6). For the men, the co-commanders had convinced the Army to issue weapons to all of the flyers in the unit--Thompson submachine guns, carbines, and .45 automatic pistols. So instead of the normal Port of Embarkation training given to overseas-bound soldiers, Project 9 spent spare time at the rifle range.

In North Carolina, some flight training was also conducted. While the fighter sections assembled and began indoctrination courses on the P-51A and its Allison engine, the gliders got flying time (60:1). The gliders obtained the use of two C-47 "tugs" and crews, one each from the 436th and 439th Troop Carrier Squadrons, and practiced single, double, and automatic tow; airborne glider pick-ups; flying in position below the C-47; and night operations (37:2). Double tow was emphasized to maximize airlift capability. In this method, two gliders, one on a short rope and the other on a longer line, were towed by one C-47. Close coordination between glider pilots and a steady hand by "tug" pilots was required. As a result of their skills, two of

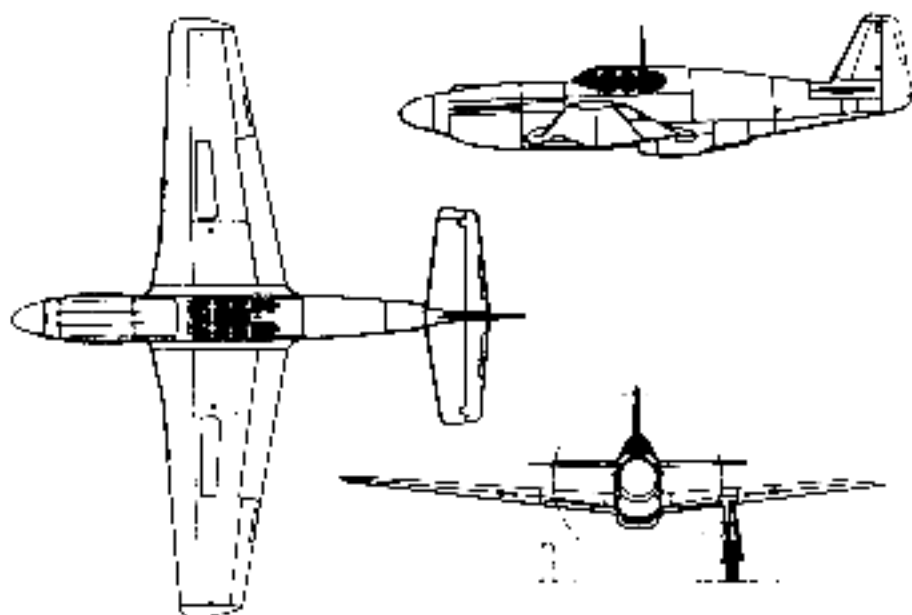


Fig. 15 P-51A Mustang

the "loaned" C-47 pilots, 2Lt Patrick Driscoll and 2Lt Vincent L. Ulery, were asked to join Project 9.

The light plane pilots also worked with the gliders by towing TG-5 gliders, but primarily they busied themselves learning about their airplanes. Because the L-1 was obsolete and the L-5 was new to the USAAF inventory, most of the "flying sergeants" had not flown either and certainly not under the anticipated conditions in Burma. To simulate jungle obstacles, Maj Rebori stretched ropes across the Raleigh-Durham runway and made the light plane pilots practice short-field landings and takeoffs over and over again. While airborne, they trained themselves in low level flying. When the townspeople complained about planes flying at 100 feet, Maj Rebori replied they should have been lower! (68:--)

Originally scheduled to embark about 15 December, the group had to curtail the entire training program when the departure date was moved up 45 days (37:1-2). As the embarkation date neared, the enthusiasm of the unit soared. Flight Surgeon Cortez Enloe said, "They had the greatest morale of any outfit I ever saw, but not such strict discipline." (25:106) When the first group to leave Goldsboro was issued gear, complete with ammunition, some of them discharged their weapons in the railroad station while waiting for the train. Bullets were withheld from subsequent groups (60:2). Armed with a transportation priority high enough to "bump" Generals, the unit was scheduled to fly from Miami to Karachi, India, by way of Puerto Rico, Trinidad, British Guiana, Brazil, Ascension Island, Gold Coast, Nigeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Aden, and Masira Island (65:--). Ahead of the main unit, Col Cochran was already on his way, leaving Miami on 3 November.

True to his word, Gen Arnold had superimposed the organization on SEAC by forwarding a letter to USAAF MGen George Stratemeyer, a member of Mountbatten's staff and soon to be named commander of the Eastern Air Command. In the letter, dated 13 September, Gen Arnold stated, "...the Air Task Force will be assigned to the Commanding General of the United States Army Forces in the China-India-Burma [sic] Theater for administration and supply and operate under the control of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, South-East Asia." Gen Arnold had also carefully defined the purpose of Project 9:

- (1) To facilitate the forward movement of the Windgate [sic] columns.
- (2) To facilitate the supply and evacuation of the columns.
- (3) To provide a small air covering and striking force.
- (4) To acquire air experience under the conditions expected to be encountered (41:Memo for Chief of Staff, Subject: Air Task Force Windgate [sic], dated 13 September 1943).

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Knowing the mission given him by Gen Arnold, Col Cochran wanted to discuss the latest developments with Adm Mountbatten, find facilities for his personnel and aircraft, and complete the training programs when he arrived in India.

Despite an engine change and a short delay enroute, Cochran and a small group of his men arrived in Western India on 13 November (62:April 1980:2). One of Cochran's first duties was to report to Delhi where Adm Mountbatten had temporarily set up his headquarters.

When Cochran first talked to the SEAC staff, the facts of Gen Arnold's letter were not generally known and changes had been made to the Quadrant Conference plans. As Col Alison later wrote:

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When Colonel Cochran arrived in the theater the general plan for Wingate's operation was to march into Burma initially three long-range penetration brigades. One to cross the Chindwin River from the West, one to march down from the North and a third to be flown to China and marched across the Salween to spearhead a Chinese advance. This unit would have to be moved by air to China, then resupplied by air from Chinese bases. [USA] General Stilwell [Deputy Supreme Commander of SEAC] said that because of air lift limitations this would be impossible and the whole plan of offensive operations in Burma for this season were in danger of being abandoned. Colonel Cochran arrived at this meeting where [British] General Auchinleck [Commander-in-Chief in India], General Stilwell, [USAAF] General Chennault [Commander of the China Air Task Force], Admiral Mountbatten and General Stratemeyer's representative were present. At this time no-one in the theater, not even Admiral Mountbatten or General Wingate, knew what the 1st Air Commando Group intended to do for Wingate's operation. Colonel Cochran was called upon to explain why we had been sent into the theater and at this meeting he explained to the Chiefs of Staff that it was not necessary to fly the third brigade to China, that the brigade should be streamlined and that the 1st Air Commando Force would move this brigade into the heart of Burma from bases in India. He was asked if this was

Having found a permanent home, Cochran and Alison were able to turn their full attention to supporting Wingate's 3rd Indian Division, also known as Special Force. It was during this stage of evolution that the 5318th conducted training exercises with the Chindits, enlarged their own assault force, and exploited Gen Arnold's fourth purpose, "to acquire air experience under the conditions expected to be encountered."

During the time that Capt Taylor's men were rigging gliders, they also conducted joint training drills. These operational tests with the Chindits helped cement the bond between the two units.

Flight training practice began on 29 December. Ten days later, a 20-glider day exercise was performed in which 400 men were landed on a mud field at Lalitpur. Even though four gliders did not release, the exercise was pronounced a success. However, there was one problem--the gliders got stuck in the mud and couldn't be moved by ground personnel. To solve the problem and demonstrate the capabilities of the unit, Col Cochran arranged to have the gliders "snatched" out that night and the following morning (37:5).

During one of the day training exercises, the assault force allayed some fears expressed about the evacuation airplanes. 1Lt Paul G. Forcey, a former RAF pilot assigned to P-51s and the character "Hot Shot" Charlie in Milton Caniff's comic strip, demonstrated the survivability of a L-5 Sentinel to the Chindits and light plane pilots. With Maj Petit flying a Mustang and Lt Forcey in a L-5, the planes squared off in a mock dogfight. Beer bets were made and covered. Using the smaller turn radius of the L-5 to advantage, Forcey continually out-maneuvered the faster aircraft. Gun cameras later verified that Lt Forcey had remained safely out of the kill envelope of Maj Petit's Mustang (66:--).

These exercises helped Special Force and Col Cochran's men worked out solutions to each difficulty. For instance, one of the problems Capt Taylor anticipated was the transportation of mules. After many suggestions, including drugging the beasts, it was finally decided on the night of 10 January 1944 to see if the animals could be transported without them kicking holes in the side of gliders. For this test, the following precautions were taken: the glider floors were reinforced, the mule's legs were hobbled, their heads were tied down to keep the ears out of the control cables, and they were restricted in a sling-like contraption. Flight Officer Allen Hall, Jr. was selected to fly the glider (49:21). Last minute instructions were given muleteers to shoot the animals if they became unmanageable. The worries were all in vain; the mules performed well, reportedly even banking during turns! (56:238)

Following this night session, Gen Wingate decided to join in the activities and participated in a "snatch." (37:1-3) Adm Mountbatten, who had also attended the night exercise, was impressed with what he saw and discussed expanding the mission with Gen Wingate and Col Cochran. They agreed that an assault group of Chindits and an engineering unit could be towed in gliders to jungle clearings in Burma. Defended against attack by the Chindits, the engineers could then cut out a landing strip for C-47 Dakotas. Once the strip was built, the remainder of Gen Wingate's brigades could be airlanded deep behind enemy lines (37:4-7; 60:25-). Capt Taylor agreed with the concept and continued daily glider training as the remainder of the unit prepared Lalaghat and Hailakandi for business.

To make their airfields operational, the men of the 5318th Provisional Unit repeated the procedures established at Karachi. Officer and enlisted personnel labored side by side to transfer oil and fuel drums from the railhead at Dimapur to Lalaghat and Hailakandi. Working virtually around the clock, the men of the 5318th were further required to strain the petroleum through chamois skins to remove rust and other impurities. Wearily the men continued the work, disregarding physical hygiene. When BGen William D. Old, Commander of the Troop Carrier Command, made a remark about the slovenliness of the unit, Col Cochran posted a notice that read:

To: All Personnel and Attached Organizations.

Look, Sports, the beards and attempts at beards are not appreciated by visitors.

Since we can't explain to all strangers that the fuzz is a gag, we must avoid their reporting that we are unshaven (regulations say shave) by appearing like Saturday night in Jersey.

Work comes before shaving. You will never be criticized for being unkempt, if you are so damn busy you can't take time to doll-up. But be clean while you can.

Ain't it awful?

P. G. Cochran
Colonel, Air Corps
Commanding (34:23)

The beards came off, the work went on, and reportedly, Gen Old got as greasy as the rest when he pitched in to help! (69:--)

Meanwhile, as the glider training progressed, Capt Taylor decided against the normal 360 degree overhead landing pattern in favor of a more rapid straight-in approach. A release point for the gliders was established 200 yards forward of the landing

field. To accommodate two gliders, the field was marked with four lights configured in a diamond, 150 yards on a side. The top and bottom of the diamond divided the landing zone in half. In effect, two landing strips were marked--one on either side of the dividing line between the flanker lights.

Then, on 15 February, a mishap occurred during a night double tow which killed four British and three US troops. The potential pall of the accident was lifted the following day when Gen Wingate's unit commander sent the following note: "Please be assured that we will go with your boys any place, any time, anywhere." (25:155) This phrase captured the degree of teamwork achieved by the British and American groups and was adopted as the motto of the 1st Air Commandos.

By contrast, RAF support to the Chindits was not as well coordinated. That fact, along with the requirement for an engineering unit, were cause for the 5318th Provisional to grow one last time.

The first enlargement occurred when problems developed concerning RAF bomber support to Gen Wingate's columns. The RAF had recently equipped their bombers with radios which were incompatible with those of the Chindits. Col Alison wrote:

At a conference with the RAF in the Imphal area it became clear that there were differences of opinion concerning the close support of Wingate columns and the mechanical feasibility of direction of assault from the ground. The RAF in this area is committed to the defense of an area, the support of an army and the support of Wingate and from the conversation it appeared that assault support for Wingate would be limited (41:Letter to General H. H. Arnold from Col John Alison, Subject: History, Status and Immediate Requirements for 1st Air Commando Force, 21 January 1944).

Gen Wingate, faced with a repeat of the same slow response received from the RAF during the first Chindit operation, appealed to Col Cochran. As a result, Col Cochran used the circumstance to request 12 B-25H Mitchell medium bombers be diverted from the theater to the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air). Gen Stratemeyer forwarded Col Cochran's request to Arnold and by 21 January, Col Alison had a commitment from Washington (75:6).

Col Cochran got the planes in early February, but he was unable to secure "seasoned" crews. He decided to use fighter pilots to man the aircraft. Given some "green" B-25 crews from

the theater, Col Cochran assigned the pilots to other aircraft within the 5318th, primarily the UC-64 of the light-cargo section (65:--). His reasoning was sound. The B-25H model was ideal for close air support as it was equipped with six 50-caliber machine guns and a 75mm cannon. The cannon extended through the normal co-pilot seat, so the Mitchell required only one pilot and could be flown much like a fighter. This convinced Col Cochran that Maj R. T. Smith should be the B-25H section commander and Maj Walter V. Radovich should act as Smith's deputy (48:4).

The final section added to the 5318th was the 900th Air Borne Engineers Company. The purpose of this group was to build airfields behind Japanese lines. Complete with air transportable tractors, road graders, and bulldozers, the company mounted an immediate training effort by constructing a completely new landing strip east of Lalaghat. Commanding the 900th Engineers was 1Lt Patrick H. Casey (48:4).

Even before this final piece completed the unit's organizational structure, 5318th personnel were getting a dose of combat. The light planes, gliders, fighters, and bombers were busy gaining experience before the main assault.

During February, the light planes divided into four sections and were dispersed to forward locations in India. The "A" squadron was sent to Ledo to support Gen Wingate's 16th Brigade; "B", to Taro for Gen Stilwell; "C", to Tamu in anticipation of the invasion of Burma; and 10 planes from "D" squadron were temporarily dispatched to support the Arakan front (60:5).

These planes from "D" squadron became embroiled in the Battles of Admin Box. Early in February, the British had become enveloped by a Japanese counter-attack, called the "HA-GO" offensive, and faced complete surrender. At Adm Mountbatten's insistence, the British were ordered to hold ground and be

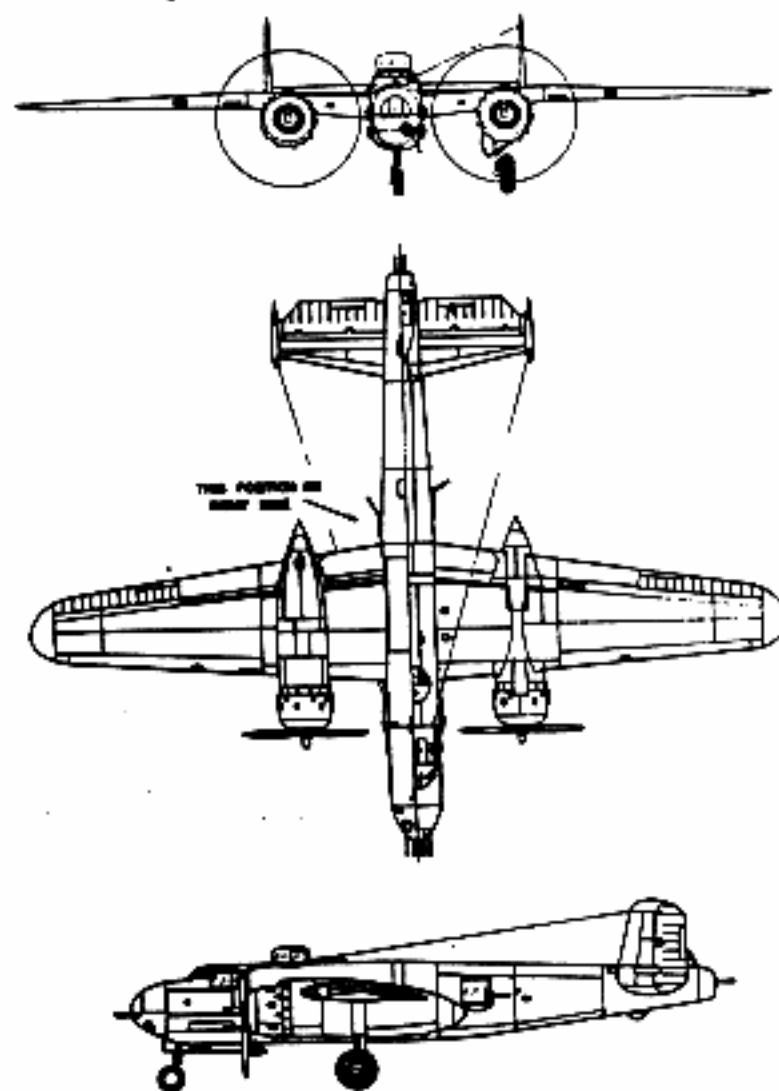


Fig. 17 B-25H Mitchell

resupplied by airdrop. From 4 February until the end of the month, the British fought back and finally defeated the Japanese. During that time, "D" squadron, flying in and out at tree-top level, evacuated the wounded. In all, the squadron removed nearly 700 British to a rear airfield for transfer to C-47 Dakotas. Impressed by the light plane pilots' courage and proficiency, Air Marshal Sir John E. A. Baldwin, Commander of the 3rd Tactical Air Force, made a personal visit to offer his congratulations (60:5; 48:7).

Like the light planes, the gliders also flew combat missions during the second month of 1944. On 28 February, a British patrol was loaded aboard a Waco and towed east of the Chindwin River. The glider was cut loose near Minsin. Damaged during landing, the plane was burned and the pilots had to make their way back to India on foot. The next day, 29 February, gliders were also called on to assist the Chindit's 16th Brigade. Led by Brigadier Bernard E. Fergusson, the brigade had departed Ledo on 1 February and needed assistance in crossing the Chindwin River. Two gliders, carrying folding boats, outboard engines, and gasoline, landed on a sand bar in the Chindwin. After offloading the materiel, they were "snatched" by a C-47 crew and returned to Lalaghat (48:7).

Additionally, starting in February, 5318th crews flew P-51 and B-25 missions into Burma for the first time. On 3 February, Col Cochran led five Mustangs on the unit's first combat mission. The B-25 section joined the fight on 12 February. During the mission, Maj Smith demonstrated the effectiveness of the 75mm cannon to Gen Wingate by blowing the roof off a large building. He later sheepishly admitted he was aiming at a railway switch 200 yards in front of the warehouse (62:March/April 1982:3; 34:21).

From 3 February until 4 March, the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air) flew 54 fighter/bomber missions, concentrating their flights on attacking Japanese lines of communication and increasing their air-to-ground proficiency. From the beginning, fighter and bomber missions concentrated on road and railroad bridges, warehouses, truck convoys, railroad locomotives, and river barges. As the assault section attacked these targets, their accuracy, proficiency, and selection of ordnance improved. Lt Col Smith later described the accuracy attained by his men in the following manner:

Our cannon and [machine guns] were bore-sighted for 1,000 yards, and a typical pass would consist of three cannon rounds at approx[imately] 1,500, 1,000, and 500 yards, interspersed with bursts of [machine gun] fire. This required making allowance for the

different ranges by sighting slightly above, then on, and slightly below the target with the optical gun sight. Passes would be initiated at anywhere from 500 to 1,000 feet above ground, and terminated practically on the deck. Most attacks were made at between 200 and 250 mph airspeeds. Now, assuming the air was reasonably calm or only moderately turbulent, most of us could hit a target the size of a one-car garage 50% of the time or better with the 75mm cannon. I know that I, and others in my squadron, scored many direct hits on targets as small as trucks and barracks-type buildings, and accuracy went up accordingly (62:January/February 1982:4).

Equally important as the missions themselves was the intelligence gathered during each sortie. Many of the ranking Chindits flew on the B-25 missions to locate and evaluate jungle clearings for possible use during the invasion. Assisting them was a small detachment, the 10th Combat Camera Unit, using hand-held cameras.

Lacking facilities in which to process film, the commander, 1Lt Charles L. Russhon (Charley Vanilla in Milton Caniff's comic strip (62:April 1981:5)), was forced to improvise. He accomplished his task by developing pictures at night in the open. To keep the area dark, a sentry stood guard on the road leading to the camp. A nearby well furnished the necessary water (48:5).

In addition to the pictures, pilots reported enemy defenses, troop movements, and noted supply lines. This information, when combined with the aerial photographs, would be used by Gen Wingate's staff to plan for his proposed offensive, named Operation THURSDAY.

As Operation THURSDAY neared, the 5318th Provision Unit was set for action. The organization had mushroomed from a light plane operation into a sizeable assault force. As it grew, the concept of mission support changed also. The use of gliders was a prime example. Originally included for resupply, Col Cochran proposed they be used to air transport one of Gen Wingate's brigades. Later, the idea of building a fortified airstrip was advanced, and the mission of the gliders changed accordingly. By 5 March the training was over, and the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air) was poised to fulfill its part of the Quadrant Conference plan. The next step, the Allied invasion of Burma, would test Gen Arnold's dream. But even up to the scheduled launch, events indicated the execution of Operation THURSDAY was in jeopardy.

Chapter Four

THURSDAY: THE SOLUTION

Throughout the time the 5318th Provisional Unit was training, Southeast Asia Command was developing alternative actions that were not in accord with the Quadrant plan. Adm Mountbatten proposed several operations to the Allied strategic planning staff: BULLFROG, an attack on Akyab Island; CULVERIN, an assault on Sumatra; PIGSTICK, a landing on the Mayu Peninsula; BUCCANEER, an amphibious offensive on the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal; TARZAN, the airborne capture of the Indaw airfield; and finally, AXIOM, a scaled down version of the "dusty" ANAKIM plan (11:Appendix 30). All were either disapproved or abandoned. Brigadier Derek D. C. Tulloch, Gen Wingate's Chief of Staff, became convinced Adm Mountbatten did not want the mission to be conducted (27:175-176).

Col Cochran felt otherwise, but did note some clumsy attempts to misdirect his unit. During the early part of January 1944, Gen Stilwell had attempted to conscript the 5318th Provisional Unit into his camp. After a clarifying letter from Gen Arnold, that idea was scotched, but other CBI units attempted to draw off Col Cochran's resources. Finally, Col Cochran produced a letter from Gen Arnold to Adm Mountbatten with the salutation "Dear Dickie." In the correspondence, Gen Arnold pointedly stated he intended no other use for Col Cochran's unit than to support Gen Wingate. Col Cochran later stated Adm Mountbatten was not at fault; instead, it was the Admiral's staff that was constantly trying to absorb the airplanes, men, and materiel of the 5318th Provisional Unit into existing SEAC organizations (56:188-196).

For whatever reason, under whomever's direction, the net result of these activities was evident. Adm Mountbatten had lost the support of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Army, Gen Slim's 14th Corps was not committed to the invasion, and MGen Wingate was irate (27:186). Apart from Gen Wingate's own 16th Brigade, only Gen Stilwell was advancing into Burma. Even Gen Wingate's hand was involved in this assault. Assisting Gen Stilwell were two American LRP units trained by Gen Wingate; established as the 5307th Provisional Unit, they were more

commonly known as Merrill's Marauders. Originally intended to augment the Chindits, Gen Wingate had released the Marauders to Gen Stilwell in January (27:164).

By 4 February, Gen Stilwell was marching down the Hukawng Valley when Gen Wingate received orders that indicated his mission had been changed to the following:

- (1) To help the advance of Gen Stilwell's combat troops by drawing off and disorganizing the enemy forces opposing them and by preventing the reinforcement of the enemy forces.
- (2) To create a favorable situation for Chinese forces to advance Westwards.
- (3) To inflict the maximum confusion, damage, and loss on the enemy forces in North Burma (27:168).

As in the first Chindit operation, Gen Wingate was again being sent into Burma without a major offensive or a strategic objective.

First considering resignation, Gen Wingate soon learned through intelligence information the Japanese were massing troops for an invasion of India. He then realized the Japanese would provide the frontal action needed, so he recanted and continued planning Operation THURSDAY (27:169). In doing so, Gen Wingate committed Col Cochran's organization to Operation THURSDAY and to Special Force until the monsoons began.

The plan for the Allied invasion of Burma was straightforward. Under cover of darkness, two small columns of Gen Wingate's Special Force, airborne engineers, and air transportable equipment would be moved by gliders into selected jungle clearings near Katha. Engineers would then prepare landing strips during the day, and transport planes would bring in the remainder of the Chindits on succeeding nights (41:Memorandum for Gen Giles from John R. Alison, 10 April 1944:2). Despite its seeming simplicity, during the planning, preparation, and execution of the plan, adjustments to Operation THURSDAY were constantly required.

Before SEAC published the operating procedures of the mission, the fluid situation around the Indo-Burmese border brought about the first changes. Prior to D-Day, the commandos were scheduled to tow 52 gliders to the area of Tamu to test the plan. The majority of the operation would then be launched from this forward location. Unfortunately, in view of possible Japanese activity in the area, the idea of using Tamu was discarded. Denied the use of this base meant the mission would have to be conducted from Lalaghat, Hailakandi, and Tulihal (Imphal), requiring the Dakotas to climb to 8,000 feet over the

Imphal plateau and cross the the Chin Hills before heading into Burma (51:2). When the revised plan was finalized, the impact of the additional altitude requirement was not fully recognized.

Gen Wingate released the operating orders for THURSDAY on 29 February. The plan stated on 5 March, C-47 Dakotas would tow 40 gliders each to Broadway (24-45N 96-45E) and Piccadilly (24-29N 96-46E), two jungle clearings named after the major streets of New York City and London. Takeoff time was set for 1700 so the pathfinder gliders would reach the objective areas just after dark. The main force would takeoff 40 minutes later with the interval between takeoffs being one minute apart (48:9).

The units involved were from both British and American organizations. British Brigadier Michael Calvert's 77th Brigade would provide the troops for D-Day; Brigadier W. D. A. Lentaigne's 11th Brigade would be injected into combat three days later. The 3rd West African Brigade, 14th Brigade, and 23rd Brigade would be held in reserve and released as the situation dictated. Seven air force units were to provide aircraft and crews--the 5318th Provisional Unit (USAAF), 315th Troop Carrier Squadron (USAAF), 27th Troop Carrier Squadron (USAAF), 31st Squadron (RAF), 62nd Squadron (RAF), 117th Squadron (RAF), and 194th Squadron (RAF) (50:1).

The 5318th Provisional Unit would spearhead the airborne requirements. Based on the double tow experience of his C-47 crews, Cochran recommended all 26 of his transport pilots be designated aircraft commanders for the mission. With some reluctance, Gen Old agreed to supply the remaining requirement for 13 aircraft and 13 co-pilots. In addition to the Dakotas and Wacos, four days before the mission, UC-64 Norsemen were added to airdrop 1,000 pounds of concertina wire and other material needed to establish strongholds at Piccadilly and Broadway (50:2).

The mission was projected to continue for seven days. The second and third days, 6 and 7 March, were dedicated to airlanding the Chindits at Broadway and Piccadilly airfields. On 8 March, the 11th Brigade would be towed to Chowringhee (23-57N 96-24E), a clearing south of the Shweli River named for Calcutta's major thoroughfare. Duplicating the procedures at Broadway and Piccadilly, the entire operation was to be completed by 11 March (51:9).

A fourth clearing, Templecombe (approximately 23-48N 96-10E), was also to be used, but the procedures varied from the others. Intended for a very small unit, Dah Force, the strip was to be cleared by native Burmese labor under the supervision of a special operations agent (51:7). The date and time of the glider lift to Templecombe was flexible; the mission would be cued by a signal that Templecombe was secured. As events were to prove, the

execution of the entire Operation THURSDAY plan was a demonstration in flexibility.

The day of the mission, Air Marshall Baldwin, senior air commander in SEAC, sent the signal that weather conditions were right and Operation THURSDAY was on. Lalaghat was teeming with activity as loud speakers barked out instructions. Tow ropes--each 300 feet long, 1 1/15 inches in diameter, with enough nylon for 30,000 pair of hose--were stretched out across the ground (67:--). Col Cochran and Gen Wingate would stay behind that night, but many of the others would participate. Col Alison, with a bare minimum of glider flights, would pilot a CG-4A to Piccadilly; Lt Col Olson was headed toward Broadway with the communications gear; and Capt Taylor would fly the lead glider (48:11). Most of the SEAC staff was present. Adm Mountbatten was absent, recovering from an eye injury, but Gen Slim, Air Marshall Baldwin, Gen Stratemeyer, and Gen Old were on hand (47:16).

This entire command structure would be called on when the sudden necessity for change occurred during the execution phase. While Gen Wingate busily directed activities out of a tent at the west end of the runway, Col Cochran, on a hunch, ordered Lt Russhon to take last-minute photographs of the clearings from a B-25 (48:9). Later, nearing scheduled departure time, the solemnity of the operation was brought home when the escape kit was issued--90 silver rupees and a small block of opium (34:21). Col Cochran added to the moment by concluding his mission briefing saying, "Nothing you've ever done, nothing you're ever going to do, counts now. Only the next few hours. Tonight you are going to find your souls." (35:9) Fifteen minutes prior to scheduled takeoff time, a light plane flew into Lalaghat with Lt Russhon aboard. With wet print blow-ups of Piccadilly, Broadway, and Chowringhee, he rushed to show them to Col Cochran and Col Alison. Broadway and Chowringhee were clear, untouched since the last look, but Piccadilly was scattered with logs in a somewhat regular pattern. Two days before, it had been clear. The pattern effectively made Piccadilly a potential death trap for gliders! (21:226-227; 48:9-10) The commanders gathered round the photos to discuss the implications and options.

Two plausible arguments were offered to explain the conditions at Piccadilly. First, the Japanese may have penetrated the plan. If this were true, then Broadway and Chowringhee may have been left open as a trap. The second reason given involved the previous Chindit operation. Piccadilly was the same clearing which British Maj Scott had used in 1943 to air evacuate his men. Since photographs of the area had been published in the 28 June 1943 edition of Life magazine, the Japanese did not necessarily have to know about the mission. If they had felled the trees, the Japanese may have done so for precautionary measures. The latter



Fig. 18 Piccadilly
Conference: (L-R)
Russhon, Taylor,
Cochran, Alison,
Scott, Baldwin,
Calvert, Wingate,
Tulloch

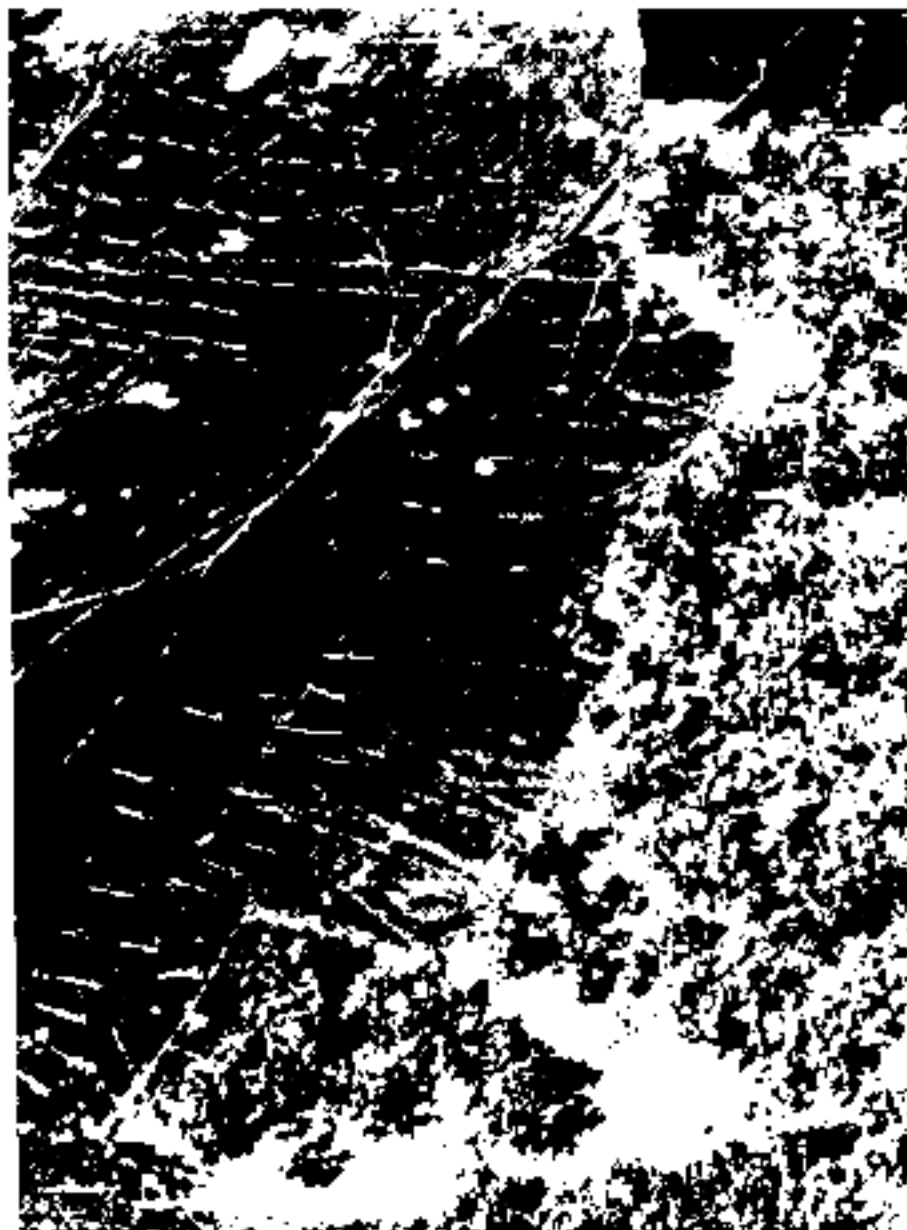


Fig. 19 Piccadilly

was accepted as most probable (21:226). Hindsight later showed the condition was the result of Burmese teakwood farmers. Regardless of the cause, Piccadilly was ruled out.

The most logical solution was to transfer the Piccadilly troops to Chowringhee; however, it was not the best under the circumstances. Brigadier Calvert opposed this recommendation because the Shweli River ran between the two landing zones, thus cutting his brigade in half (51:4). The commanders ruled out cancellation because of the negative effect on morale. Airlifting the entire brigade to one location was the only other option. Gen Slim reduced the requirements to 60 gliders and committed the entire mission to Broadway. Col Cochran took the responsibility for breaking the news to the C-47 and CG-4A crews previously ticketed for Piccadilly. With typical aplomb, Gen Slim wrote, "He sprang on the bonnet of a jeep. 'Say fellers,' he announced, 'we've got a better place to go to!'" (21:228-229) For such a major decision to be made, the British and American commanders delayed the mission only 72 minutes.

As the first C-47 with two gliders in tow lifted off at 1812, the mission was now out of the hands of Gen Wingate and Col Cochran; it belonged to the Dakota crews, the glider pilots, and the forgotten UC-64 section.

For the C-47 aircraft commanders and glider pilots, the climbout phase was an indication of future problems. Each C-47 pilot was to fly a left-hand box pattern to achieve altitude. The procedure was to hold runway heading for two minutes, turn left for another minute, then left for a base leg of four minutes, left for another minute, and finally left again to fly back over the field. If the Dakota was at or above 2,500 feet while passing over the runway, the pilot continued to Broadway. Some pilots experienced a lower climb rate than anticipated and had to circle over Lalaghat. As this happened, Lt Ulery related, he barely avoided a mid-air collision (69:--).

Unfortunately, additional glider-related problems occurred during the climb to cruise altitude. Four gliders crashed shortly after takeoff; two were cut loose over Lalaghat when their Dakota developed electrical problems; and two more were released over Imphal when their "tug" experienced such high fuel consumption that Broadway was unattainable (50:3). All eight of these gliders landed west of the Chindwin.

For the others, there were problems after crossing the Chin Hills--tow ropes began to fail. Col Cochran later described the difficulties to Gen Arnold:

The moon was almost full but was partially offset by bad haze conditions. Gliders were

overloaded, average gross load for each glider being approximately 9,000 lbs. [Technical Data limited gross weight with cargo to 7,500 pounds (67:--)] Most of the difficulties were encountered after altitudes of above 8,000 ft. had been reached and mountain ranges and turbulent air had been crossed. As the tow planes started their descent poor visibility over the Chindwin area and the tendency of gliders to overrun the tow plane (accentuated by heavy loads) created a surging of the gliders which was extremely difficult for the pilots. In the worst cases the tow ropes broke. The part in the ropes invariably was caused when both gliders surged at the same time and the shock of the tow rope was taken up simultaneously by the one lead rope (49:8).

A total of nine gliders were lost east of the Chindwin. Lt Col Olson was aboard one of those gliders, as were Maj Richard W. Boebel, intelligence officer; Capt Weldon O. Murphy, a medical officer; and others. The treks back to safety for the downed crews were marked by the heroism of one of the glider mechanics. During a crossing of the Chindwin River, Cpl Nienaber, a non-swimmer, was swept away from Maj Boebel's escape party by the strong currents. Rather than call for help and possibly give away the group's position to Japanese patrols, he silently drowned--grimly determined not to utter a sound (25:239; 48:18). Seven of the nine crews eventually made the harrowing journey back to India or on to Broadway (42:5).

By coincidence, the gliders seemed to go down near Japanese headquarters. Two gliders landed in the immediate vicinity of the 31st Divisional Headquarters, two more landed near 15th Divisional Headquarters, and three gliders close to the Regimental Headquarters area. The Japanese interpreted these landings as raiding parties in support of Gen Slim's 4th Corps (51:5). Serendipitously, the tow rope problem had created a diversion. SEAC reported, "It is probable that this diversion assisted for over a week in keeping Japanese attention focussed [sic] away from the area of the main landings..." (58:87)

The problems encountered by the gliders at Broadway were not so fortuitous. By 2200, Capt Taylor, in the lead glider, touched down on Broadway and the Chindits fanned out to intercept any Japanese (51:4). There were none. Capt Taylor ordered the green flare lit and positioned the smudge pots. As the succeeding gliders established themselves on the lights, the pilots cut loose at 1,000 feet and began their descent toward Broadway. The extreme overweight conditions caused the glider's approach speed to be much higher than planned.

The resulting landings were unpredictable and hazardous. The second Waco pilot had to crash land his CG-4A to avoid hitting Capt Taylor's glider, while Col Alison, third into the clearing, landed without incident. Col Alison immediately took over command of Broadway. A quick inspection of the ground showed the strip was not as suitable for the assault as photographs had shown. The clearing was traversed with deep ruts from dragged teakwood trees. Tree trunks and water buffalo holes were also masked from aerial photographs by tall elephant grass (14:11). With gliders though, there was no way to turn them back. When they touched down, the speeding gliders caromed off the tree stumps and furrows, ripping off landing gear and smashing to a stop. Without landing gear, the men could not move the crippled gliders out of the path of the incoming waves (61:74). One Waco pilot, 1Lt Donald E. Seese, avoided a disaster by "jumping" his glider over an inert tangle of canvas, steel, and wood (63:--).

To mitigate the congestion, Col Alison and his men rearranged the smudge pots to disperse the landings. The glider assault continued as pairs of gliders plummeted toward the interior of the diamond. For Col Alison, the pace was exhausting; after each pair landed, the pots were repositioned. Most gliders touched down within the landing zone; two did not. They undershot the field and crashed in the jungle, killing all on board; included on one of those gliders was the commander of the engineers, Lt Casey (48:5). Medical Officer, Capt Donald C. Tulloch began treating the wounded during the on-going assault while other personnel tried to extricate trapped men from the twisted wreckage. Complicating Col Alison's problems was an inability to communicate with Col Cochran and Gen Wingate in India; his one radio was damaged during landing (52:10).

Back at Lalaghat, the launch of Dakotas had been followed by a 10-ship formation of UC-64 aircraft. Not adequately equipped for night flying, the wing airplanes soon lost visual contact with lead. Unfortunately, members of the flight had been briefed to simply stay in formation and follow. Capt Wagner and his crew chief, SSgt Felix C. Lockman, Jr., became separated from the others; they continued the mission but were unable to locate the objective area. Returning to India and running low on fuel, they were forced to make an emergency landing at an unknown strip. Luckily it was held by the British. Another UC-64 did not reach Broadway because the crew had not been properly briefed about the change of landing sites. When they lost sight of the formation, 2Lt Fred H. Van Wagner and Capt Leon R. McMullen flew on to Piccadilly. Seeing no lights, they turned back, not dropping their stores. They too ran short of fuel. Unable to locate Lalaghat because of similar navigation radio frequencies in the area, the two pilots had to bail out (65:--). In total, only two free-fall bundles were dropped near Broadway, and this portion of Operation THURSDAY was considered a failure (48:12).

Meanwhile, the Dakotas had begun returning to Lalaghat slightly later than 2300; after a limited debrief, the crews prepared to fly again. Based on the tow rope difficulties, Gen Old recommended crews no longer pull two gliders. Believing double tow still feasible, Col Cochran launched some Dakotas with two Wacos in trail, but after reconsidering, he agreed to cut back to single tow (50:3). Including those released in the Assam area, a total of 63 gliders were dispatched to Broadway.

Finally, at 0227 on the morning of 6 March, Col Cochran and Gen Wingate received a coded message from Broadway (51:4). Repairs to the damaged radio set had been slow and risky. Periodically dodging the incoming gliders or falling tow lines, the communication specialist worked feverishly to make it operable. Finally able to transmit for a limited time, the single code word, "SOYA-LINK," was sent. Before the mission, Brigadier Tulloch had established only two code words, "PORK-SAUSAGE" and "SOYA-LINK," for the mission. The former would indicate all was well; the latter, named for a meat substitute hated by the British, meant trouble--no more gliders should be dispatched. Due to atmospheric conditions, the message was not received directly from Broadway. Passed through two intermediaries, Col Cochran and Gen Wingate could not know the circumstances at Broadway. Brigadier Tulloch wrote, "Those at Lalaghat had a mental picture of parties of men in close contact with an undetermined number of enemy." (51:4-5) They assumed the landing field was under attack!

Wrestling with the situation, Col Cochran ultimately decided to recall the second wave. When the recall was broadcast, all aircraft except one responded. The Dakota that continued had a glider tow of engineering equipment.

An exhausted and discouraged Col Alison was almost asleep when he heard the last gliders release. To Col Alison's horror, the glider flew beyond the landing field and pranged between two trees. The noise of the crash was deafening; the silence that followed, foreboding. Col Alison was sure everyone on board was dead; however, he was wrong. Auspiciously, the pilot had rigged the bulldozer to the hinged nose of the glider. As the equipment



Fig. 20 CG-4A with visor raised

broke its mooring and shot forward, the visor raised the pilots out of the way as the bulldozer cleared. When the nose slammed shut, the only mishap was a broken thumb to the pilot--the equipment was not even damaged. Significantly, on board the last glider was 2Lt Brackett of the airborne engineers, a man who would play an influential role in the completion of Broadway (60:8).

When dawn brought slivers of light to the darkness of the jungle clearing at Broadway, the losses to personnel and equipment became a grim reality. In all, 37 Wacos had arrived; almost all, 34 gliders, were damaged and could not be towed out (51:Appendix E). The injuries to personnel were not as bad as originally thought; only 33 were injured severely enough to require evacuation. Fortunately, the number killed was also low, much lower than Col Alison had anticipated. A total of 31 men were originally reported killed--4 Americans and 27 Chindits (61:76). Later this figure was reduced to a total of 24. The number dead was almost totally comprised of the personnel in the two gliders which crashed into the jungle; only four persons were actually killed on Broadway (51:4). A simple grave was dug in the trees at the edge of the clearing and a Burmese chaplain held a eulogy for the lost comrades in arms.

Balanced against the losses were the accomplishments. During the night, Gen Wingate's staff figured 539 personnel, 3 mules, and 29,972 pounds of stores were delivered to Broadway (48:12). Capt Taylor's report showed a total glider payload of 221,648 pounds on the manifests (49:27). These figures did not include the supplemental supplies added by the Chindits that never appeared on any official documents, nor did it reflect the changes to the loading plan because of Piccadilly. Col Alison later attested to the fact that Gen Wingate's figures were somewhat in error. While he had been frantically directing the glider landings and running from one smudge pot to another, a Chindit had offered him the use of a horse flown in on a Waco glider! (63:--)

At 0630 on 6 March, Brigadier Calvert was able to get a message through requesting evacuation planes for the injured. Maj Rebori quickly responded by launching nine L-1 Vigilants, one from Tamu and eight from Taro, and six L-5 Sentinels from Taro. Flying at tree-top level, the light planes arrived over Broadway by early morning. They planned to stay and operate out of this forward base. Rather than expose all the light planes to the enemy, only six patients were actually evacuated that day. The remainder would be airlifted aboard a C-47 when the airfield was finished (61:77).

Alison, seeing the mass of twisted gliders and undulated surface, talked to the surviving engineering officer about preparing the strip. Asked how long it would take to make an



Fig. 21 Wreckage at Broadway (note log in foreground)

airfield, Lt Brackett replied, "If I have it done by this afternoon will that be too late?" (39:4) And he did it! Personnel not needed elsewhere were put on the job. Using manual labor and the undamaged equipment, the men began filling the ruts and flattening the ground. Improvising with teakwood logs between tractors to make crude graders, engineers began to level the field.

Finally, at 1000 Gen Wingate established direct communications with Brigadier Calvert at Broadway. The 77th Brigade commander informed Gen Wingate and Col Cochran the field was secure, they had been unopposed by Japanese, and the airfield should be ready to receive transport planes by nightfall (51:5). Gen Wingate was beside himself with relief and joy! By 1630, the good news was better. A report was forwarded, saying by evening a 4,700-foot strip would be completed and lit (50:3).

The first flight of six Dakotas tookoff at 1730 with Gen Wingate aboard and Gen Old in the lead airplane. Told to approach from the South, Gen Old chose to land from the North due to traffic. He reported the field was narrow but useable. Troop Carrier Command sent 62 C-47 sorties into Broadway that night, departing from both Lalaghat and Hailakandi (50:3). Col Alison related that Broadway was as busy as any civilian airport, punctuating his remark with "LaGuardia has nothing on us." (2:182) The only accident reported was to two RAF transports; the damage was slight and the planes were flown out two days later.

With the good news about Broadway, Gen Wingate decided to move the 11th Brigade into Chowringhee two days earlier than planned. Based on the previous night's experience, Col Cochran approved single tow operations and prepared 12 C-47 Dakotas for the job. Like the assault on Broadway, the first gliders contained Chindits and engineers. All made it to destination; however, one Waco overshot the clearing, killing all on board. That glider also contained the only bulldozer slated for Chowringhee (50:3).

Plans for the following day were based on landing transports at Chowringhee the night of 7 March 1944. That day, at about 1200, Lt Col Gaty, commander at Chowringhee, radioed that without the bulldozer, the strip would not be prepared on schedule. Col Cochran immediately dispatched a C-47 to Calcutta to obtain another bulldozer. The load was transferred to a glider which departed for Chowringhee at 2100. At Broadway, Col Alison had also responded by loading one of his bulldozers on a serviceable glider. A C-47 then towed the load to Chowringhee, arriving by 2100. It was still estimated the strip would not be available until after midnight (50:4).

The delayed preparation of Chowringhee required Col Cochran to change plans again, diverting some C-47 sorties to Broadway until Lt Col Gaty was ready. Without Japanese resistance, the landing strip at Broadway was being improved during the day. Based on handling 16 aircraft per hour, Col Cochran ultimately launched 92 C-47 aircraft to Broadway that night. At 2330 the code word "ROORKEE" was received indicating Chowringhee was serviceable for C-47 Dakotas. A 6-ship wave was airborne for Chowringhee by 0029. By the time 24 Dakotas had taken off, Chowringhee reported that only 2,700 feet were lit and approved for use. With 4,500 feet required for night operations, Brigadier Tulloch issued the recall order (51:5-6). Of the seven which did not return, none experienced landing difficulties (50:4).

Even while the airlift into Broadway was being conducted, the men of Col Cochran's assault force were prowling Burma looking for the Japanese Air Force. No Japanese action was observed until 8 March when intelligence discovered the enemy was massing aircraft in the Shwebo area of Central Burma. Deciding to

arm each aircraft with a single 500-pound bomb. Lt Col Mahoney led a 21-plane fighter sweep over the enemy airfield at Anisakan, Burma. Discovering about 17 fighters on the ground, Mahoney's formation attacked. After dropping their bombs and auxiliary fuel tanks on anti-aircraft positions, the Mustang pilots set up a strafing pattern, making as many as eight or nine passes (60:10).

On the way back to Hailakandi, Lt Col Mahoney led his flight over the airfields of Onbauk and Shwebo. There the formation found about 60 aircraft--fighters, bombers, transports, and trainers--in the process of landing or already on the ground. Instructed to go for the bombers, the Mustangs duplicated the procedures used in the raid at Anisakan. Diving on the airfields, the assault force continued to make iterative passes until all their ammunition was spent (60:10).

The pilots in the formation had used their bullets wisely. Destroyed on the ground at all the airfields were 27 fighters, 7 bombers, and 1 transport; in the air, the Mustang section added another fighter (52:Appendix D:9). As he departed the area, Lt Col Mahoney alerted the bomber section at Hailakandi to be prepared to launch when the fighters returned (60:10).

Within 45 minutes of landing, Lt Col Smith, who had been flying a P-51, changed planes and flew back to the Onbauk and Shwebo area in a B-25H. Reaching the fields at 2000, the Mitchells pattern-bombed the revetments with fragmentation and incendiary loads, claiming an additional 12 aircraft. Before leaving, Lt Col Smith made cannon/machine gun passes and reported buildings, gasoline trucks, and an oil storage depot on fire (52:Annex C).

During the one day, the assault force had destroyed a total of 48 enemy aircraft. One squadron of fighters and 12 bombers accounted for more than 40 percent of all the Japanese aircraft destroyed by the Allies in the CBI during the month of March (60:10; 5:511). Gen Stratemyer stated, "In one mission [the unit has] obliterated nearly one-fifth of the known Japanese air force in Burma." (60:29 March 1944:8) Intelligence reports also acknowledged the importance of the raid to Operation THURSDAY by observing the mission "...no doubt nullif[ied] enemy air opposition to the original fly-in." (53:4)

With this assistance, the operations continued into Chowringhee and Broadway. By 9 March 1944, Gen Wingate decided the location and capacity of Broadway exceeded the value of Chowringhee. Therefore, he sent Brigadier Tulloch to Burma to detail the planned evacuation with the 11th Brigade Commander, Brigadier Lentaigne. The evacuation of Chowringhee was completed by 0600 on the following day--just in time; the Japanese bombed the strip of wrecked gliders at 1300 (51:6). With the emphasis now on Broadway, Gen Wingate poured in men and material. The

signal from Templecombe was not received by 11 March, so Gen Wingate transferred Dah Force from Waco gliders to Dakotas and flew them into Broadway (51:7). There was still no Japanese opposition against Broadway when Operation THURSDAY was completed on 11 March.

Figures compiled from various sources indicate the magnitude of THURSDAY. For the entire operation, the following table indicates the amount of men, animals, and equipment airlifted.

Location	Personnel	Horses	Mules	Weight of Stores
Broadway	7,023	132	994	444,218 pounds
Chowringhee	2,029	43	289	64,865 pounds
Grand Total	9,052	175	1,283	509,083 pounds

Table 1 Operation THURSDAY Summary

Of these figures, the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air) was responsible for 2,038 personnel, 16 horses, 136 mules, and 104,681 pounds of stores. Including the glider dispatched from Broadway, a total of 80 gliders were launched--63 to Broadway and 17 to Chowringhee. Personnel sent to the two strips by glider totalled 971. The C-47 effort, which included Troop Carrier Command and RAF flights, amounted to 579 sorties (48:14; 49:Annex 3; 50:4).

Although these are impressive figures, the most momentous feature of the operation was the establishment of an airfield and the delivery of fresh troops more than 200 miles behind enemy lines. For the first time in military history, the backbone of an invasion was airpower. As soon as the Chindits landed, they formed columns and disappeared into the shadowed jungles. Their purpose was to strangle the supply lines of the Japanese by controlling choke points. As they stalked their way across the jungle floor, the 3rd Indian Division would continue to call on Col Cochran's men to be their artillery armada for close air support, their umbilical cord for supplies, and their airborne ambulances for the evacuation of casualties.

Northern Burma 1944

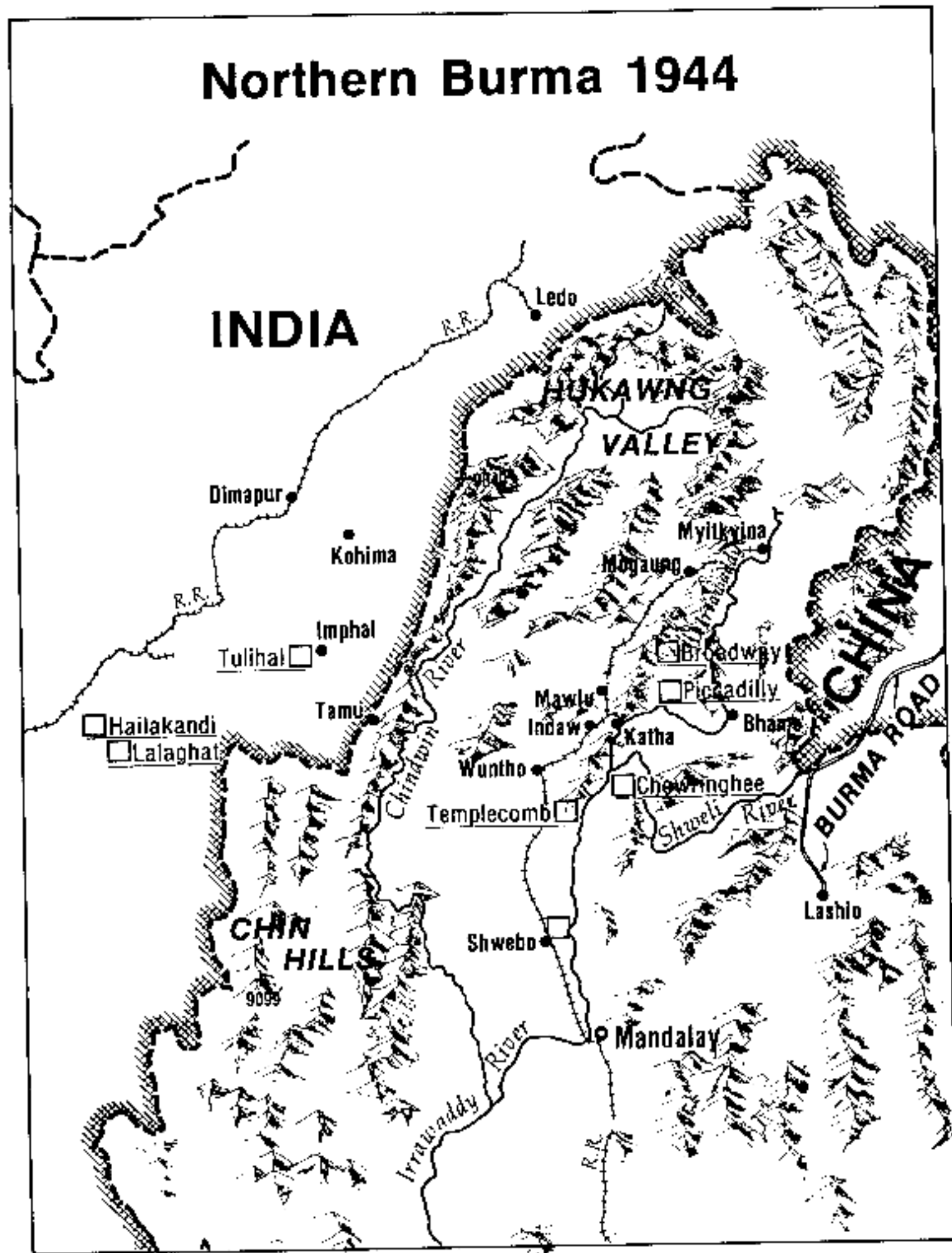


Fig. 22 Northern Burma 1944; Operation THURSDAY

Chapter Five

AIRPOWER: THE APPLICATION

As elements of the 3rd Indian Division arrived at Broadway during Operation THURSDAY, they formed into columns and set out into separate areas of Northern Burma. Brigadier Calvert's 77th Brigade drove west toward the railroad line between Mandalay and the enemy airfield at Myitkyina. Near Mawlu, the brigade was to establish a roadblock and keep supplies from reaching Gen Stilwell's opposition in the Hukawng Valley, the Japanese 18th Division. Brigadier Lentaigne's 11th Brigade was to push west-southwest toward Wuntho to cut off Japanese replacements going north by rail and road (4:26-27). Brigadier Fergusson's Brigade, exhausted from the trek across the Chin Hills, was expected to capture the Nippon supply hub of Indaw before the monsoons. There, Gen Wingate hoped to use the two all-weather enemy airfields of Indaw East and Indaw West (11:218; 27:213-218). A fourth LRP unit was also injected into Burma; Gen Wingate committed his reserve 3rd West African Brigade to Broadway for garrison support (2:110-111).

Col Cochran and Gen Wingate agreed to retain Broadway as a supply site and a harbor for the light planes. Norsemen and Dakotas kept the flow of supplies going into the heartland of Burma at night through this airfield. Approximately 30 light planes operated daily out of this behind-the-line bastion, and the strip also served the 1st Air Commando Group (officially as of 29 March 1944) as an emergency airfield (48:15; 60:9). Strategically, Broadway was invaluable.

On 13 March, two days after the completion of Operation THURSDAY, Japanese fighters finally found Broadway and tried to dislodge the air commandos. Gen Wingate had anticipated the problem by positioning RAF Spitfires, as well as P-51A Mustangs, on the field, but the fighters proved too vulnerable to enemy attacks. The air attacks occurred almost daily; personnel casualties were low but radio equipment, an early warning radar set, and a few light planes were damaged (48:15). Nevertheless, the jungle citadel remained firmly in the hands of the Allies. Later, Japanese ground forces engaged Col Claude Rome and his Chindit garrison troops; however, they were repulsed. Like

frustrated children, the Japanese slashed at the canvas skin of the light planes with bayonets before receding into the jungle (68:--). The airfield was never overrun and was protected enough to eventually include maintenance shops, a hospital, a small garden, and even a chicken farm! (16:115)

Meanwhile, the Chindits were being supplied by Troop Carrier Command. Constantly reconnoitering the area for possible drop zones, the brigades literally lived and functioned from one drop to another. When Gen Wingate's troops passed a message to India that a clearing was available, C-47 Dakotas would be scheduled to takeoff after dark and fly to the coordinates given. As they neared the site, the Dakota pilots searched for an L-shaped row of lights to pinpoint the Chindit position (12:167). This was always a critical time because of the exposure of the C-47 and Special Force.

At first, all drops were made using parachutes, but results were spotty. The Chindits reported loads landing anywhere near the zone to some distance away because of winds. Finally, to lessen the drift effect, only delicate loads were rigged with chutes; the remainder were pushed out the door to free fall to the awaiting troops below (12:168). The supplies contained anything and everything consumable for the brigades--food, ammunition, and medicine. Special Force would then gather the stores and disappear into the undergrowth.

Although the supply drops were normally conducted at night, the light plane functions required actions during broad daylight. Precautionary measures were necessary. If the Chindits had injuries, casualties, or jungle sicknesses, they requested evacuation support, provided the location of a suitable clearing, and established an arrival time. To locate the ever-moving brigades, the light plane pilots (commonly called L-pilots) instituted a signal system to assure positive identification. Codes were tried and soon abandoned except when used in conjunction with map coordinates and time over target; decoding caused response time to be too slow and required centralized control. In short order, satisfactory results were attained by using aerial mosaic photographs and setting aside one frequency, 4530 kHz, for all ground-to-air radio traffic (52:11). Combining the mosaics and direct communication, a Chindit RAF liaison officer could describe ground locations from the perspective of the pilot flying overhead. As a final precaution, before attempting to land or drop supplies, the L-pilots also looked for predetermined visual signals such as "Very" flares, smoke, or panels (52:9).

Unlike the debilitating effect on the 1943 LRP expedition, treatment of casualties by this time became a source of high morale. Under normal circumstances, the wounded were brought back

to Broadway and transferred to a UC-64 Norseman or a C-47 Dakota. When a soldier required immediate attention, the L-pilots would fly directly to hospitals in India if possible. Also, the air commando UC-64 pilots augmented the L-series planes by flying to larger clearings to evacuate up to 10 litter patients at a time (65:--). Even though the L-1 was supposed to only carry a maximum of three patients, Chindits reported it was not uncommon to see a Vigilant stagger skyward with five to seven casualties on board (68:--). Col Alison later gave a testimonial to the effectiveness of the commando air evacuation effort by saying, "A man could be wounded anywhere in the battle area and that night he would be in a hospital in India." (38:9)

It was not long before the air commandos recognized the versatility of the L-5 Sentinel; they expanded the role accordingly. Husbanding the L-1 Vigilants for air evacuation, the light plane section found a number of uses for the ubiquitous L-5. Often these aircraft were the vital backup supply link to the stealthy Chindits. Rigging 75-pound parachute packs to the bomb racks, the Sentinels made emergency airdrops of ammunition or food to brigades who had been missed during normal C-47 resupply missions. In addition to dropping supplies, the pilots used their imagination to develop new applications for the light planes. The following are examples of functions ultimately performed by Sentinels in support of Special Force:

- (1) Transporting headquarters personnel,
- (2) Dropping medical supplies,
- (3) Landing replacements,
- (4) Evacuating prisoners of war,
- (5) Transporting glider personnel,
- (6) Making reconnaissance flights,
- (7) Returning captured documents and material,
- (8) Transporting official orders,
- (9) Delivering mail,
- (10) Gathering intelligence information, and
- (11) Spotting targets for the assault sections (59:Report of Air Marshall Baldwin on Operation THURSDAY:5).

Never before used on this scale or in this fashion, the light planes performed spectacularly (53:6). Early in the operation, Gen Wingate expressed his appreciation of the L-pilots by saying, "Without you men and your aircraft, this campaign could not have hoped to be a success." (54:5)

Bouyed by the actions of the air commandos, Gen Wingate felt confident about his air power theory. By the third week of March, the Chindits were crouched in four locations preparing to leap on the logistic tail of the Japanese dragon. While waiting for Special Force to deploy, the P-51A Mustangs and B-25H Mitchells had roamed the skies of Northern Burma striking supply lines,

because the supply hub now played a major role in the Nippon strategic plans for the conquest of India (4:289).

As the Chindits were being flown into Burma during Operation THURSDAY, Lt Gen Renya Mutaguchi, commander of the Japanese 15th Army, launched his own invasion. It was a 3-pronged attack into India called Operation U-GO. The Japanese 33rd Division advanced from south of Tamu; the 15th Division, from east of Imphal; and the 31st Division, through the Tuza Gap east of Kohima. The Japanese 18th Division in the Hukawng Valley was also involved; they were to block Gen Stilwell's Chinese troops from joining in the fight (55:48-49). The genesis of the plan could be traced to Operation LONGCLOTH. As a result of Gen Wingate's first expedition, Gen Mutaguchi had determined the Japanese defensive posture in Burma was vulnerable (55:7). Therefore, he decided to cut off the British from their supply depot at Imphal and interpose Japanese troops on Indian soil prior to the monsoons. From this "toehold," he would increase his outer perimeter of defense. Additionally, Gen Mutaguchi planned to use the operation to generate favorable propaganda for a "March to Delhi" by Indian National Army leader Chandra Bose (11:446). Gen Mutaguchi hoped the U-GO offensive would be swift, lasting less than a month, as the invading troops were provided only a 21-day ration of supplies (55:41). Each division would provide its own provisions along the avenue of advance until the invasion; thereafter, the Japanese would move stores by the Shwebo-Imphal Road as well as the previous supply routes (55:49). The only all-weather artery was between Shwebo and Imphal; inauspiciously, the "dry season only" routes were near the area of Gen Wingate's Chindits.

With the required major offensive now in being and knowing the poor supply conditions of the Japanese, Gen Wingate felt he was on the verge of proving LRP theory. He immediately dispatched an optimistic letter to Winston Churchill concerning the situation (27:223). Tragically, within days of reading the news, the Prime Minister was shocked to learn the circumstances in Burma had changed.

For Special Force, lightning struck on 24 March and the direction of the wind forever shifted against the Chindits. Gen Wingate flew to the front lines in a L-5 on 23 March to observe the operations and discuss strategy with his brigade commanders (11:212). After the conferences, he proceeded to Broadway where he boarded an air commando B-25H (52:2). Following an intermediate stop at Imphal, the aircraft headed west for Gen Wingate's headquarters at Shylet. He never arrived. On the last leg of his journey, the Mitchell bomber inexplicably exploded into the side of a hill, killing all on board.

Mystery and intrigue accompanied the crash. Strangely, despite the flight path, the aircraft impacted sharply into the

west side of the mountain range--it was heading east! (68:--)
Questions were raised about engine trouble, weather, and even sabotage; none of the answers were conclusive. The aircraft nosed-in and the wreckage was severely confined. The only recognizable clue to the passengers on board was located near the crash site; it was the familiar pith helmet of the Chindit commander (68:--). Those who died along with Gen Wingate were Capt T. G. Borrow, his adjutant; Stewart Emeny and Stanley Wills, war correspondents; 1Lt Brian F. Hodges, pilot; 2Lt Stephen A. Wanderer, navigator; TSgt Frank Sadoski, SSgt James W. Hickey, and SSgt Vernon A. McIninch, crewmembers (27:286). Interestingly, according to the rules of war, all the bodies were buried at Arlington Cemetery outside Washington DC.

Gen Wingate's death came in the midst of the most complicated operation ever attempted in that theater and robbed the Allies of a colorful and dynamic commander (52:2-3). In selecting a successor, Gen Slim did not choose an original Chindit, such as Brigadier Calvert or Brigadier Fergusson. Neither did Slim pick Gen Wingate's Chief of Staff, Brigadier Tulloch; instead, he opted for the most orthodox officer within Gen Wingate's former command--Brigadier Lentaigne. The new Special Force commander's credentials were beyond reproach; he was a competent and heroic officer. However, he did not indorse LRP theory, nor was he favorably impressed with the late Gen Wingate (2:161). Although Col Cochran's mission would not change, events soon showed that under Gen Lentaigne, the ideals of LRP were discarded. By mid-April the Chindits would begin to form large formations and attack fortified positions. For the time being though, the operations continued with the air commandos giving direct ground support to columns at the stronghold at White City, at the C-47 airfield of Aberdeen, along the supply roads and bridges west of Wuntho, and to a splinter unit from the 77th Brigade cutting the traffic lines between Lashio and Myitkyina.

Toward the end of the first month of the invasion, a frustrated transport crew supplemented its airland resupply missions by trying a hand at bombardment. On 25 March, while making a supply run into Broadway, a Dakota pilot dropped two mortar shells on some Japanese trucks. Three days later, the same crew spotted another convoy of mechanized transport and dropped fragmentation bombs, mortars, and incendiary bombs from the side door of the C-47. The pilot explained, "We may not have done any damage but I'll bet we scared the hell out of them." (60:12)

March also closed with two important personnel changes. During the month, command of the L-1/L-5 section changed hands. The need for the change came to light when one of the squadrons moved up to an airfield called Dixie, inside the border of Burma. Shortly after flying operations had begun, intelligence reports

indicated the enemy was advancing in the area and would soon overrun the strip. Acting on short notice, the hasty departure from Dixie was not accomplished well. Code books and reports were left behind. More seriously, some of the deployed L-pilots were not informed the field had been abandoned. When they returned, luckily the enemy had not penetrated the camp (68:--). In the aftermath of the debacle, Col Cochran decided to alter the organization of the light plane section because the operations of four separate squadrons could not be tracked adequately. As a result of the change, the L-series aircraft were placed under the command of Lt Col Gaty (52:8).

The other personnel move left Col Cochran without his right hand man. On 28 March, Gen Arnold called Col Alison home to help establish four more air commando units. At Broadway when summoned, Alison wasted no time getting back to India. Commandeering a RAF Dakota with a badly damaged wing, Alison flew the crippled plane out with the help of an engineer who told him flap and throttle settings (63:--). By the time he arrived at Hailakandi, Col Alison had a second message requesting he brief Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower's European Theater Staff on Operation THURSDAY. He departed India on 1 April for Washington by way of the British Isles (52:2).

Under the dual leadership of Cols Cochran and Alison, the air commandos had accumulated an impressive set of statistics. The C-47 Dakotas had flown in over 450,000 pounds of supplies during March, and the CG-4A Waco gliders had delivered an additional 310,000 pounds. The light planes estimated they evacuated 1,200 to 1,500 casualties before the end of the first month of the operation (52:6-8). Damage inflicted by the assault force during March is shown in Table 2.

CATEGORY	DESTROYED
Aircraft	50
Trucks	29
Rolling Stock	48
Locomotives	4
Bridges	8
Warehouses	38
Bashas	55
Ammunition Sites	7(60:12)

Table 2 Assault Force Damage Report for March

During this critical month of action, the Allies established air superiority over Burma for the first time. USAAF records indicate the Japanese lost 117 airplanes in the third month of 1944 (5:511). Significantly, the 1st Air Commando Group--only a single squadron of fighters and 12 bombers--accounted for 42.7

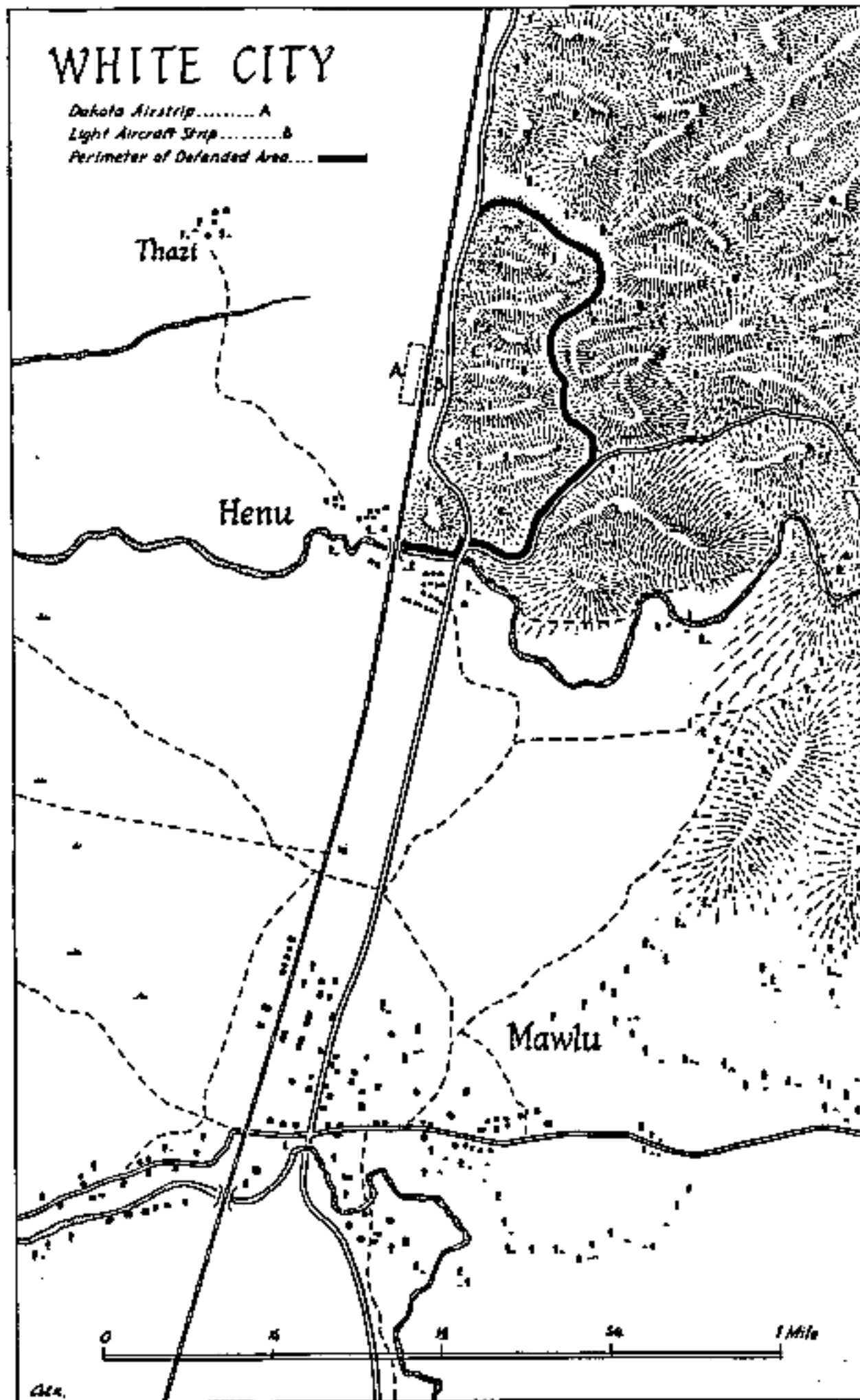


Fig. 24 White City Stronghold

percent of the total Japanese aircraft destroyed! And the following month would be equally impressive.

Early in April, the air commandos "reprised" the Anisakan-Onbauk-Shwebo mission; only the location changed. Acting on intelligence information of Japanese movement in the area of Rangoon, the commando assault force took off at 0800 on 4 April heading for Aungban, Burma. Just prior to the arrival of the Mustangs, the Japanese had scrambled their fighters from Heho to parry a P-38 attack from the USAAF 459th Squadron. Shortly after the enemy fighters recovered into Aungban, Lt Col Mahoney's P-51A Mustangs arrived over the airfield. Finding the Japanese aircraft parked next to and in revetments, the commandos kept the anti-aircraft batteries at bay with rockets while strafing the field on continual passes. The assault force destroyed 4 medium bombers and 20 fighters on the ground. In the air, Capt Forcey dove on an enemy aircraft, making a pass within 200 yards before pulling off; the Japanese fighter poured smoke and exploded. On the way home, the fighters also destroyed an enemy bomber on the ground at Anisakan. The total enemy losses were 26 verified kills, and the air commandos did not lose any P-51A Mustangs during the mission (52:Annex C).

As the Allies asserted air superiority over Burma, the work of the air commandos showed dramatic results. The situation at White City illustrated this aspect. The Japanese had continued their pressure on White City, storming Calvert's position almost daily since the block had been established. Likewise, the fighters and bombers of assault force frequently pounded the Japanese positions around the stronghold (11:283-286). Throughout this time, the light planes removed casualties from a small strip constructed next to the railroad line. Because there was no enemy air opposition, a L-5 Sentinel pilot offered to fly Brigadier Calvert over the surrounding area to locate and record enemy concentrations (2:200).

To dislodge the Japanese, Calvert used this new information to request bombing attacks within 50 yards of his own position. The accuracy of the air commando attacks and the incessant bombing finally proved too much for the Imperial troops. On 15 April, a Chindit wrote in his diary, "...air action on this occasion against the enemy has been consistent and destructive. Amongst other things it has been shown that aircraft alone can force the enemy to move or leave his artillery." (53:Appendix B:1) The air attacks had caused the Japanese to break ranks and run, leaving behind everything--dead, documents, equipment, and weapons! (2:126) With this kind of help from Col Cochran's men, Special Force effectively blocked the rail line into Myitkyina for nearly two months. As a result, the holding action by the 18th Division was useless (20:223).

Meanwhile at Aberdeen, 16th Brigade continued to use the 1st Air Commando Group and Troop Carrier Command to resupply their attempt to secure Indaw. On the night of 7 April, a Nippon fighter pilot sent a shudder through the transport organizations when he intercepted a RAF Dakota on approach at Aberdeen. The C-47 suffered damage to the landing gear and lost one engine, but the pilot was able to land without casualties (52:7). Nevertheless, the effect of this incident was profound. The Allies could no longer assume flights into behind-the-line airfields would be conducted with impunity. Thereafter, C-47 Dakota sorties were synchronized to arrive and depart stronghold airstrips at dusk and dawn. Additionally, fighter escorts were assigned to patrol the area. Fortunately, the attack was not repeated and all future transport flights were conducted without incident (52:7).

The attack at Aberdeen did not affect the L-pilots though; they continued flying unescorted while establishing a reputation for courage and skill. In supporting the Chindits, the air commandos were known for their ability to fly out of places others could not. For example, when Merrill's Marauders were pinned down at Nhpum Ga, their own L-4 Grasshoppers were unable to extricate the sick and wounded because of the small landing strip. Gen Stilwell immediately ordered the air commando L-1 Vigilants to air evacuate the casualties. Altogether, the light planes took out over 350 hospital cases (68:--).

The light plane pilots further enhanced their reputation by developing a novel method of air support that proved to be very effective. During the construction of Aberdeen, one of Brigadier Fergusson's RAF liaison officer became separated from his column and discovered a large supply dump in the jungle around Indaw (4:289). When he finally returned to his brigade, the officer requested assistance from the air commandos.

Frustrated because he was unable to establish the location of the site using maps or aerial mosaics, Lt Col Gaty asked the RAF officer to fly with him in a L-5 Sentinel to reconnoiter the area. Pinpointing the position, he returned to Aberdeen to set up a rendezvous with the assault force. As the P-51A Mustangs and B-25H Mitchells arrived at a pre-arranged point, Lt Col Gaty had the RAF liaison officer mark the target with a smoke bomb as the L-5 cleared the tree tops. The Mustangs and Mitchells delivered their ordnance on the smoke (48:20-21). Due to the success of this coordinated mission, the light plane pilots continued to use "forward air controller" methods and occasionally even dropped grenades on small targets themselves (65:--).

In support of all the Chindit brigades, Col Cochran's men were also employed in a more orthodox role. Targeted against Japanese surface and river lines of communication, the air commandos were equally effective. Flying replacement P-51B

Mustangs, the assault force attacked the Shweli River bridge, a target which had on numerous occasions withstood Eastern Air Command bomber attacks. The bridge controlled a major supply route to Northern Burma. On 21 April, Maj Petit proved the accuracy of the dive-bombing Mustangs when he scored a direct hit with two 1,000-pound bombs and collapsed the span (60:13). This is only one example. By the end of the campaign, the road and railroad system of Burma was so confused, the Japanese were unable to move supplies from Northern Burma to their only useable traffic artery--the Shwebo-Imphal road (55:62).

While the assault force hammered on the Japanese lines of communication, the light plane force concentrated on the evacuation of casualties. In April, the 1st Air Commando Group made military history by placing the YR-4 helicopter into combat. Unfortunately, the helicopters Col Alison had worked so hard to secure proved to be less useful than hoped. Of the original four rotary-winged aircraft, two were lost before they had flown a successful mission in the CBI. Enroute to India, a C-46 transport crashed while carrying one of the untested craft. A helicopter pilot flew a second one into a power line on a training mission and crashed, killing a passenger. Finally, on 21 April, 1Lt Carter Harman flew a YR-4 on a rescue mission into Burma to evacuate a light plane pilot forced down on a Japanese-controlled road. The downed L-pilot and his passengers were directed to seek shelter in the hills while awaiting the rescue. Because of overheating problems, the helicopter flew by stages to Aberdeen. When he arrived on 23 April, Lt Harman was immediately pressed into action. He successfully transferred the pilot and three casualties to awaiting L-1 Vigilants and returned to Aberdeen on 24 April. Lt Harman continued to fly combat missions until 4 May. When Aberdeen came under heavy Japanese bombardment, Lt Col Gaty ordered Lt Harman and his craft back to India. In the 23 combat sorties performed, the concept of the helicopter was proved; however, the YR-4 was grossly underpowered and eventually was withdrawn after the engine failed due to overheat (52:12).

The month of April again provided some impressive statistics for the 1st Air Commando Group. Table 3 shows the damage inflicted by the assault force during April.

CATEGORY	DESTROYED
Aircraft	35
Trucks	4
Rolling Stock	6
Bridges	3
Barracks	45
Bashas	130
Ammunition Sites	5
Anti-aircraft Positions	11(60:14-15)

Table 3 Assault Force Damage Report for April

United States Army Air Force records indicate during the month of April the Japanese lost 107 planes (5:511). For the second month in a row, the contribution of the 1st Air Commando Group was staggering; the Mustangs accounted for 32.7 percent of the total Japanese aircraft destroyed within the CBI Theater.

May marked the sixth month that the air commandos had been in India. According to Gen Arnold's plan, on 1 May Col Cochran's men were scheduled to be relieved of duty and sent back to the US. The plan was altered because, as Col Cochran said, "...we kept wanting to protect those troops that were still in there." (56:288) As of 17 May, the 3rd Indian Division officially came under operational control of Gen Stilwell, but even prior to that time he had ordered the 11th, 14th, and 3rd West African Brigades to move north toward Mogaung (20:221). Gen Stilwell wanted the three brigades to link up with Brigadier Calvert's men to assault the Japanese garrison located there.

The 16th Brigade had already been sent back to India in early May. In Burma longer than the other units, Brigadier Fergusson's men showed signs of sickness, exhaustion, and strain (58:91). Gen Slim order their withdrawal. The other four brigades were in equally bad shape, but Gen Stilwell decided not to relieve them; he feared their retreat would attract Japanese troops toward his position (20:221). After "salting" the abandoned strongholds of Broadway, Aberdeen, and White City with land mines, the Chindits began working their way north through the jungles and rice paddies.

The 11th Brigade, now commanded by Col John Masters, was responsible for applying further pressure on the Japanese logistic lines that fed the 18th Division. On 9 May, Col Masters selected a site and requested gliders to build an airstrip. Known as Clydeside, the block was redesignated Blackpool when the original name was compromised (53:3). Despite valiant fighting, the 11th Brigade never fully secured the stronghold, in part because Gen Mutaguchi released some of his U-GO reserve soldiers to fight the Chindits (55:61). The full brunt of these fresh troops flushed Special Force out of Blackpool after only two weeks. Another part of the problem at Blackpool was weather--the monsoons broke before the brigade could get entrenched (12:213). Flying during the intervals between squall lines, the assault force shelled and bombarded the perimeter of the bastion, but the support lacked continuity.

Just before the monsoons, the air force of the Rising Sun made a last ditch attempt to regain control over Burma by bringing up large numbers of replacements (5:511). It was too little, and it was too late. On 19 May, the fighter section had just arrived at Blackpool when a flight of 16 Nippon warplanes were spotted. Salvoing their bombs on Japanese positions around the stronghold, the air commandos attacked the enemy fighters and

bombers. During the dogfight, the P-51 pilots shot down one bomber and two fighters. There was no damage to the seven Mustangs (53:Annex C:2).

This was the air commandos' last hurrah; weather was now critically hampering the effectiveness of the group. Col Cochran tried to operate out of the airfields in Eastern India as long as possible; it was a dangerous gamble. The rains soaked the grass strips at Hailakandi and Lalaghat, turning them into quadmires. At one point, Col Cochran felt he had waited too long. He related, "We had one tough rain where actually there was a couple of feet of water on the landing strip." (56:288) Unable to avoid the pending torrent, Col Cochran ordered the air commandos back to Asansol, an abandoned British airfield in Central India. On 23 May, the last UC-64 raised a "rooster tail" as it slogged down Halakandi's grass strip for the final time. The pilot's log read, "Beat bad storm by inches." (65:--)

Once the air commandos arrived in Asansol, the number of personnel began to thin out. Col Cochran convinced Gen Stilwell to send men back to the US if they had completed two tours of duty in the war (56:290). Falling into that category was Col Cochran himself. Before departing for Washington and eventually Gen Eisenhower's staff, he relinquished the 1st Air Commando Group to Col Gaty. In turn, Lt Col Boebel took over the far-flung light plane section (53:2).

Lt Col Boebel ordered all the light planes back to India; however, he was unaware part of his section stayed in Burma to fly casualties to hospitals. Without the strength of their air artillery, the 11th Brigade had retreated from Blackpool on 24 May, and the brigade fled westward toward Lake Indawgyi. Col Masters described the support he received during the withdrawal as follows: "The American pilots of the Light Plane Force came, hour after hour, day after day, to the little patch of swamp we had made into a strip, and shuttled back through the heaving skies." (12:234) A group of eight light plane pilots continued evacuating Col Masters' sick and wounded until an alternative solution was found (35:17). Finally, Col Masters convinced Gen Lentaigne to divert a Sunderland seaplane from the Bay of Bengal to Lake Indawgyi to assist the effort (12:233). Altogether, nearly 400 casualties were airlifted to hospitals northeast of Dimapur (58:91). When Lt Col Boebel located the group, the light plane commander immediately ordered them to return to India. This was the final action of the 1st Air Commando Group during the 1943-44 dry season.

The effect of the air commandos' protection and support of the 3rd Indian Division was felt as far away as Imphal and Kohima. After an initial success and savage fighting, the Japanese U-GO offensive was pushed back. As the Imperial troops fled toward their previous sanctuary of Burma, Gen Slim pursued

with a vengeance. After the war, the Imperial Army generals spoke of the failed offensive and pointed out very succinctly their assessment of the impact of Operation THURSDAY and the LRP phase that followed: "The penetration of the airborne force into Northern Burma caused the failure of the Army plan to complete the Imphal Operations...the airborne raiding force...eventually became one of the reasons for the total abandonment of Northern Burma." (55:61) In a monograph, Gen Mutaguchi and others stated specifically, the operation had the following impacts:

- (1) The [15th] Army was unable to advance its headquarters until the end of April because it was forced to provide measures against the airborne force. Consequently, communication with various groups became inadequate and eventually caused a hostile attitude between the Army and its divisions in later operations.
- (2) Transportation of supplies to units engaged in the Imphal Operations became very difficult because of damage to roads which prevented the transfer of vehicles from the rear preparation area to the Shwebo-[Imphal] Road.
- (3) Elements of the 15th Division, 24th Independent Mixed Brigade, and 53rd Division scheduled for the Imphal operation, were involved elsewhere.
- (4) The 5th Air Division was forced to operate against the enemy airborne unit.
- (5) The 18th Division which was fighting desperately in the Hukawng area had to deal with an increasingly difficult situation due to interception of the supply route (55:62).

Furthermore, Lt Gen T. Numata, Chief of Staff of the Japanese Southern Army, affirmed the impact by saying, "The difficulty encountered in dealing with the airborne forces was ever a source of worry to all the headquarters staffs of the Japanese army and contributed materially to the Japanese failure in the Imphal and Hukawng operations." Apparent from the remarks of Lt Gen E. Naka, Chief of Staff, Japanese Burma Area Army, is the effectiveness of the air commando's "forward air controller" raids on the supply dumps at Indaw. He certified the Indaw lines of communication became useless as they were "wiped out by bombing and ground raids." (4:289)

Because actions speak louder than words, the most telling argument for the operation can be found in Lt Gen K. Sato's actions during Operation U-GO. By late April, his unit, the 31st Division, was feeling the effects of THURSDAY; they were very short of ammunition, provisions, and food. In May, Gen Sato sent a message to Gen Mutaguchi stating, "Since leaving the Chindwin we have not received one bullet from you, nor a grain of rice." (23:230) Food was in such short supply, some men subsisted on

grass and black slugs; sickness, such as beriberi, was sapping the 31st Division's fighting ability (55:73). Finally, Gen Sato radioed Gen Mutaguchi that he was withdrawing from Kohima. When threatened with a court martial, Gen Sato replied, "Do what you please. I will bring you [Gen Mutaguchi] down with me." (23:230) Ordered back into the fray, he refused again saying, "The 15th Army has failed to send me supplies and ammunition since the operation began. This failure releases me from any obligation to obey the order--and in any case it would be impossible to comply." (16:156)

Clearly, from the testimony, the first air invasion in military history was instrumental in defeating the Imperial Japanese Army. Additionally, Gen Wingate's LRP theory was completely substantiated. The air commandos and the Chindits had caused widespread confusion and uncertainty behind the enemy's forward areas which led to a progressive weakening and misdirection of the Japanese main forces. Heavily influenced by the actions of the 1st Air Commando Group and the 3rd Indian Division, a nation known for fanatical obedience suffered the ultimate shame of having a general break down in combat and abdicate. Col Cochran and Gen Wingate had accomplished their task; they had helped bring the Japanese war machine to its knees. The British 4th Corps still had much fighting to do, but the successful execution of Operation THURSDAY had caused the pendulum to swing in favor of the Allies.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS

Before closing this study of Gen Arnold's unique strategy, modern military historians need to be aware of more than the accomplishments of the 1st Air Commando Group in combat. Together, Gen Arnold and the team of Col Cochran and Col Alison inaugurated a heretical concept in airpower employment. First, Gen Arnold imposed conditions on the mission and structural relationship of the 1st Air Commando Group. Then, Col Cochran and Col Alison enhanced the process by constructing a composite air force which was self-sufficient and cut across existing organizational lines. The effect of this combination was more than expected. By examining the 1st Air Commandos, the resulting dynamics of these maverick ideas impacted Operation THURSDAY and the campaign that followed. Simply stated, this combination produced an autonomy which overcame the organizational malaise which existed in SEAC. Gen Arnold's strategy was a success because it addressed the principles of linkage, reality, and future.

Linkage is that element of strategy that assumes objectives are clearly defined, attainable, and acceptable. As the strategy process develops, linkage is the thread that ties ends to means (7:15-16). To understand how Gen Arnold incorporated linkage in the 1st Air Commando Group, a recap of the circumstances in the CBI is required.

The situation in Burma was a classic case of a defensive stalemate--trench warfare without the trenches. Adm Mountbatten's staff prepared numerous plans for the reconquest of Burma, but they scrapped each one. The planners seemed to be stymied by the constraints of materiel and men. In part, the SEAC staff had lost its perspective of the war; in truth, the opening of the Burma Road was inconsistent with British national objectives. Prime Minister Churchill sought a return of the British Empire and, consequently, a weak China. His ability to achieve this desire was exacerbated by Great Britain's overextended economic and industrial conditions. In seeking assistance from the US, Churchill was forced to trade national objectives for war materiel. SEAC's planning staff manifested the resulting lack of

linkage by cranking out numerous plans which answered British desires but conflicted with US interests.

Gen Arnold recognized the actions of SEAC and acted to link the 1st Air Commando Group directly with US strategic goals. The US sought to keep the Imperial Japanese troops occupied in China; therefore, the Burma Road was crucial to US and Allied interests in the Pacific. For this reason, Gen Arnold tied Adm Mountbatten's hands by limiting the circumstances for the 1st Air Commando Group's participation in the CBI. Adm Mountbatten was hamstrung by the arrangement. If he wanted more US help, which Britain needed desperately, he would have to follow the dictates of Arnold's conditions. This meant Operation THURSDAY would have to be launched regardless of British desires. As Gen Wingate's plan was the only operation which promised to reopen the land supply artery to China, Gen Arnold took measures to insure his investment. Linkage was achieved; the 1st Air Commando Group acted as the catalyst for actions in the CBI which met US national objectives.

As Col Cochran's men swung into action, the attribute of reality became evident. Reality is the principle that separates facts from illusion (7:17). Gen Arnold knew initiation of Operation THURSDAY was not enough. For the campaign in Northern Burma to succeed, the Chindits would have to be fully and rapidly supported. During the previous Chindit campaign, Gen Wingate had noted deficiencies in the RAF response to his requirements; their procedures were agonizingly slow. In the situation facing the 3rd Indian Division, these inherent delays were totally unacceptable--men's lives were at stake. Gen Arnold faced the reality that adding airplanes and men to the existing SEAC structure would not achieve the desired results. Therefore, Gen Arnold dictated that operational control of the 1st Air Commando Group would reside with Adm Mountbatten. This isolated Col Cochran and his men, thus enabling them to concentrate only on the mission. Totally dedicated to supporting the Chindits, Col Cochran and Col Alison streamlined procedures to achieve responsiveness. Unfettered by competing priorities, the 1st Air Commandos were a service organization in the truest sense of the word.

Finally, Gen Arnold provided for the future by sanctioning the concept of a composite organization. Future is that principle that answers problems by focusing on tomorrow as well as today (7:16). Gen Arnold's first step involved the selection of commanders; Col Cochran and Col Alison meshed to form a dynamic team. The outstanding result of their forward thinking was Operation THURSDAY, the first air invasion in military history. But future was addressed throughout the spectrum of tactics. They encouraged the use of new equipment and concepts. Helicopters, rockets, mobile hospitals, and light planes are examples of their

look toward modern weapons. Col Cochran and Col Alison introduced or enlarged the ideas of forward air controllers, airland resupply in tactical operations, and close air support. By crossing vertical lines of orthodox organizational structure, the unit filled the gaps between all elements of airpower--fighters, bombers, transports, and air evacuation. Col Cochran's men established a benchmark in collaboration and cooperation; each member of the air commandos contributed to the accomplishment of the mission. Gen Arnold envisioned the 1st Air Commando Group as an experiment looking toward future air warfare; he achieved his goal.

Gen Arnold broke through the inertia in Burma, created a mission-dedicated organization, and achieved synergy by the skillful use of a maverick strategy. In the book In Search of Excellence, the authors speak to the 1st Air Commando Group when they stress the attributes of a bias for action, a focus on the customer, and autonomy and entrepreneurship (17:119-234). The 1st Air Commando Group was the embodiment of those ideals that are recognized today as cornerstones of healthy, progressive institutions. The story of Gen Arnold, Col Cochran, Col Alison, and the men of the 1st Air Commando Group trumpets the might of airpower and the wisdom of a strategy that combines the principles of linkage, reality, and future. An unorthodox strategy in aerial warfare, the group serves as a model organization for use in unconventional conflicts.

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