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# **MILITARY HISTORY**

## **LECTURES ONE & TWO**

### **VOLUME 1 – 3**

**LECTURE NOTES FOR  
SENIOR STAFF COURSE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION**

Prepared under the direction of

**Chief of Army Staff**  
**2013**

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**NOTE**

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**VOLUME 1 - GUIDE TO CANDIDATES AND THE  
NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GUIDE TO CANDIDATES

#### INTRODUCTION

1. Military History ought to be an impersonal and dispassionate account of wars, their causes and effects. However, it is difficult if not impossible to write history without a taint of bias. If this makes the study of military history difficult waters, it actually renders it a most Herculean task for students. For officers who are consciously preparing for an examination that means everything to their careers, it could really become a nightmare. Accordingly, the approach to the study of military history determines the degree of perceived difficulty as well as the degree of understanding of the subject. Performance level therefore is dependent largely on how well a student prepares and is prepared for the examination.

2. One noticeable trait in candidates is the “*crash*” approach to military history. It is impossible to comprehend appropriately, let alone benefit maximally from anything done in a hurry. Candidates are advised to commence preparation for the military history paper at least one year before the exam is due. Guide which will assist candidates to do well and even excel in the SSCQE are outlined in subsequent paragraphs.

### **REFERENCE MATERIALS**

3. It is advisable to read a wide range of reference materials on most subjects such as the Nigerian Civil War, Burma Campaign etc. the aim is to acquire a broad based perception and knowledge of each campaign. Proper attention should be paid to preparation, planning, conduct and resulting effect of each campaign. Again, attempts must be made to put into proper perspective plans, forces, aims and effects of most battles and campaigns. The terminal objective is to learn so that mistakes of the past are not repeated in the present and even in the future.

### **MAKE YOUR NOTES**

4. As a candidate progresses from general to specific reading, it is advisable to make notes. Such notes will eventually serve as useful revision materials. Possibly, the notes should be made neatly and supported with good maps, sketches and diagrams. They could be as detailed as possible to save the candidate the trouble of having to read too many texts when the exam date is very close.

### **KNOW YOUR MAPS**

5. A good knowledge of the geography of the area of operation is vital to the understanding of any campaign. A candidate cannot expect to master the Burma Campaign for instance without a good knowledge of the geography of the area covering, Japan, China, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma and India. Similarly, a good knowledge of the countries around the Mediterranean Sea is crucial to the understanding of the North African

Campaign. In fact, without good supporting maps, it may be difficult to fully understand the Yom Kippur War.

6. Candidates are advised to evolve their own maps and in enough information so that at a glance such map(s) tell the whole story.

### **READ THE TEXT OVER AND OVER AGAIN**

7. A candidate becomes familiar with any of the campaigns only by reading about them over and over again. The modules should not be read like ordinary novels found on book shelves. A candidate that hopes to excel in the SSCQE must cover the various texts at least 20 times, each before the examination. There are no cutting corners as regards this requirement.

8. In reading the text however, it may be useful to occasionally discuss with other candidates to clear grey areas. Besides, it is always useful to try re-enacting some war situations to get the proper "gist".

### **ATTEMPT PAST QUESTIONS**

9. A candidate's major aim is to pass his exam. It will be quite helpful to attempt answering past questions within stated time frames. Such practice could effectively prepare the candidates for the rigours of actual exam conditions. Again referring answers to knowledgeable third parties could induce the necessary confidence required to excel in Army examinations.

### **EXAM TECHNIQUES**

10. There is mistaken belief by candidates that answering tough questions

is the only way to passing the exam. This is a faulty perception as most questions carry equal marks and have been prepared in such a way that time lost in answering a difficult question is gained while answering a relatively simple one. However, it is common for some candidates to spend too much time on a difficult question. For others, it is usual to pick the easier questions and quickly sort them out. The advantage of this strategy is obvious. It generates the necessary confidence required to tackle the difficult questions. In addition, it is usually possible to save time by answering the simpler questions first.

### **PREPARING FOR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

11. Military history is regarded as a very voluminous subject and as such, many candidates resort to “perming” specific questions. This gamble sometimes pays off where the “permed” question is found in the actual question paper. However, most often such predetermined question bias the mind of the candidate. Where a permed question is asked out of its intended context, the candidate may run the risk of answering out of point. “Perming” should be done with a lot of discretion to avoid the “straight-jacket” situation of a candidate being constrained to provide an answer that is unrelated to the question.

12. There is no hard and fast rules to predict possible areas that will be tested in the exam. A good sense of judgment coupled with adequate preparation is all that are required to do well in the SSCQE.

### **ANSWERING QUESTIONS ON MAJOR CHARACTERS**

13. Materials on field commanders in the Nigerian Civil War are scanty. Sometimes candidates may resort to irrelevance in order to produce a bulky but large empty write-up. Such make-belief attempts really do not solve the problem. The option here is to answer the questions where you can write reasonably on the various facts available.

14. Again, there is a major limitation as regards available texts on the Civil War. First, it was a fratricidal war. Second, no serious attempts were made by the major actors to document their roles and experiences. However, it is believed that most of these actors will in future put pen to paper and allow the younger generation to fully appreciate why, when, how and with what the Civil War was fought.

15. While writing on Field Commanders, candidates must note the following:

- a. Individual characteristics of command.
- b. Tactical ability.
- c. Qualities of leadership.
- d. Personal relationship with others.
- e. Major achievements.
- f. Adherence to principles of war.

### **QUALITY OF MAPS AND DIAGRAMS**

16. Candidates must ensure that they produce first class quality maps and diagrams. This is possible only through constant and persistent practice.

Candidates are therefore advised to ensure that they have a thorough knowledge of the maps and diagrams required to illustrate their answers. They must endeavour to perfect the production of such aids and illustrations. A poor sketch will not only infuriate the marking DS but could in some cases attract negative marking. A good and neat map or sketch is a delight to the candidates as well as the examiner.

**READ THE QUESTIONS CAREFULLY AND PLAN HOW YOU WILL ANSWER THEM**

17. It is amazing how candidates sometime lose their cool in the exam hall. One useful way of calming nerves is to spend about 5 - 10 minutes reading and understanding the questions, after which the questions a candidate wishes to answer are selected.

18. The logical step to take after selecting the question is to plan how to answer such questions. This would usually entail determining how best to present your answer in an easily understandable manner to have optimal impression on the examiner. Sometimes the mode of presentation could effectively cost a candidate a lot of marks, and the examiners put much premium on presentation.

19. Candidates may wish to know that it is usual to mark for neatness, SD, style, content, diagrams, sketches, maps and tables. A logical and well illustrated answer would normally earn the candidate high marks and even the occasional bonus.

## **HAVE SOME LEISURE**

20. Any candidate who has planned his work well ahead can always organise some leisure. On the other hand “CRASHERS” are not likely to have any time for leisure as they will most times be “Racing to Rangoon” !!! And at this time, Rangoon may be very far away.

21. At the risk of repetition, a long term plan based on a generous supply of reference materials will always be found invaluable. Effective research and consultation carried out well in advance will usually generate the necessary confidence that can allow the occasional leisure.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE MODULE**

22. At the end of this module on the Nigerian Civil War, the candidate will be able to:

- a. Understand the political climate of Nigeria between 1960 and 1966, which culminated in a civil unrest and consequently led to the Civil War.
- b. Appreciate the preparation by both the Federal and Biafran forces.
- c. Highlight the conduct of the War and the important operations on the various fronts.
- d. Study the performance of various commanders in battle field conditions.
- e. Identify the useful military lessons as may be deduced from the strategy and tactics used by both the enemy forces in the campaign.
- f. Acquaint himself with some useful guides that would make his

preparation for the SSCQE a little easier.

## **CONCLUSION**

23. The SSCQE is a make or break landmark in the career of army officers. The guide presented here is not exhaustive and only serves to remind candidates that there is more to the SSCQE examination than just reading voraciously.

24. This Guide is meant to supplement and in some cases complement other techniques that may be peculiar to candidates. On behalf of the Chief of Army Staff, we wish you the very best of luck in your efforts not only to become a major but also to qualify to attend the Senior Staff Course.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR**

#### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

##### **PREAMBLE**

1. Military history is aimed at presenting events as they relate to causes and effects; major characters in battles, campaign and wars; informing the curious as well as educating individual soldiers and officers. Curiously, it helps to present in an unbiased manner, tactical and strategic plans, allocation and utilization of resources including the adherence to the Principles of War by field commanders. From a purely historical view point, no General who ignored the lessons of history ever won a war.

2. Furthermore, military history is designed to broaden perception of the soldier, sharpen his intuition and enlarge the range of his choice of decisions in varying strategic and tactical circumstances. The ultimate aim is to apply the lessons of yesterday's solution in his attempt at solving present and future military problems.

3. The Nigerian Civil War was peculiar in very many ways. First it was a fratricidal war in which the belligerents exercised some degree of caution (especially at inception) in prosecuting the war. Expectedly, it was difficult, if not impossible to develop a savage psyche level consistent with that required for an unknown enemy in a conventional war setting. By all considerations therefore most of the officers and soldiers knew themselves,

had trained together and were only being human if unconsciously, they still wished each other the best. Secondly, the war was fought on Nigerian soil and there was an active awareness that after the war, Nigeria would still be expected to reconstruct damaged structures, rehabilitate roads and bridges and reconcile the warring factions. Thirdly, the Civil War was the first major war that Nigeria would wholly prosecute on its own as an independent sovereign state.

4. The Nigerian Civil War must therefore be studied in the content of relatively young warring armies, consisting of officers and soldiers with limited exposure to combat. Besides, most of the officers had scanty knowledge of staff work and as the war progressed, the officers' corps was made of mostly of officers who were granted Field Commission. While bravery and courage were not lacking in such category of officers, it was obvious that the lack of formal officer - cadet training heavily depreciated their output. However, such officer must be highly commended for their excellent performances in spite of their obvious handicap. It is in this context that officers must study the Nigerian Civil War.

### **BACKGROUND TO THE CIVIL WAR: PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA**

*The civil war has become part of our national experience. Historians must seek to present it as such. A major upheaval of this kind is bound to teach certain lessons, if only Historians can point the way and the citizens, as well as the leaders can apply these lessons to national issues.*

5. The landmass known as Nigeria today was an artificial creation of the British colonialists. It was an amalgamation of a conglomeration of diverse

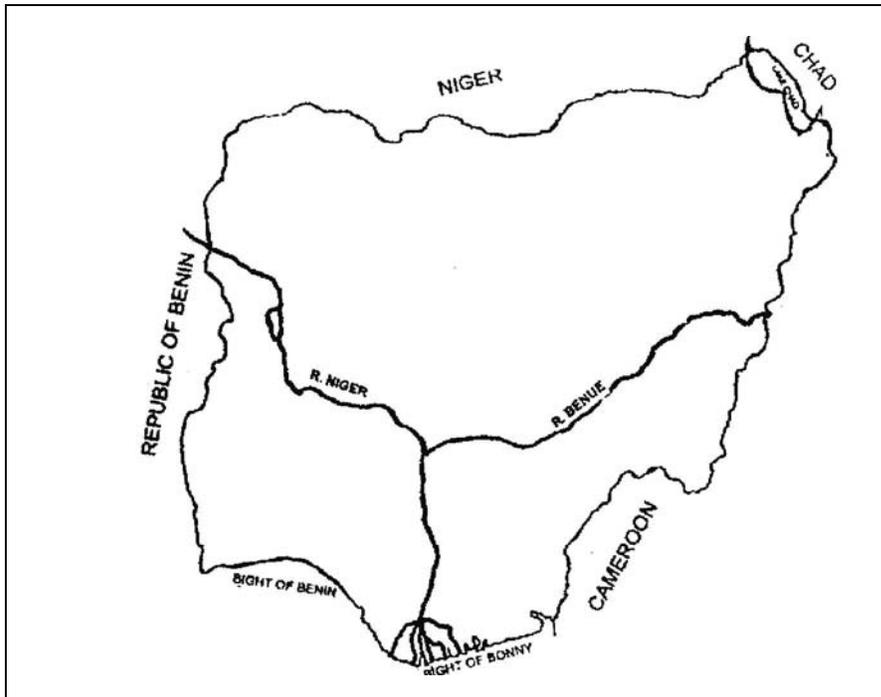
socio-cultural, political and religious multinational states. Well over two hundred different language groups inhabit the country. The Hausa-Fulani hold sway in the North, the Yoruba are predominant in the South West while the dominant ethnic group in the South-East are the Ibos. Within these three geographical areas are various heterogeneous and distinct ethnic groups that guard jealously their peculiar traits, and big enough to form independent nation states. Long distances and varying climatic conditions further separate the areas from one another. Before the advent of colonialism, contact among these ethnic groups was peripheral and restricted only to the areas of commerce and religion. These were the disparate groups that were forcibly brought together by the colonialist with administrative fiat, without due consideration for the peculiarity of the people. This was the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by Lord Fredrick Lugard.

6. Under normal circumstance, such amalgamation ought to unify the people by providing more cultural, social, religious and linguistic ties among and between the diverse Nigerians. The reverse was the case. For such unity to be effected would mean a total collapse of the colonial master's ambition to divide, rule and exploit. This unity no doubt would have been a tremendous threat to his economic interest that he came all the way from his country to exploit, control and sustain. Naturally, this perception led to the use of the 'divide and rule' policy. Although social integration was becoming feasible in various parts of the country, the ultimate result of the situation was the possibility of a natural resistant against domination.

7. Despite the colonial master's exploitative approach to the Nigerian

political integration, his coming had started laying foundation for a political independence since the World War II. As far back as 1920, the veteran nationalist politician, Herbert Macaulay, was a formidable force in Nigerian's political scene, during which elected African members were allowed to sit in the Legislative Council. By 1943, Nigerians had been appointed to the Governor's executive council and regional government had been fully developed in some parts of the country to the point of self-government I 1957. The Eastern and Western regions had organised their own legislative cabinets and had regional Premiers. As a matter of fact, these Regions having won their political struggle with the colonial masters concentrated on their own regional problems rather than national issues. In addition, crude oil had just been discovered in the Eastern coast and, unknown all the parties involved, this development became a source of inspiration for both parties involved in the eventual crises that erupted.

8. Before independence in October 1960, several constitutional conferences under the British had been organised, all strengthening and isolating the Regions, thus, creating a weak central government. Such constitutional conferences as that of 1946, 1951, 1957, 1959 and 1960 had the various regional and ethnic leaders representing their regions where they had already had a firm and strong base. Their struggle resulted in a weak central government and favoured tribal and sectional politics.

**FIGURE 1: POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA**

9. The Sarduna of Sokoro, a traditional ruler and a political “god father” of the Northern region was a descendant of Usman dan Fodio, the founder of Sokoto dynasty. He therefore controlled the new generation’s aspirations through the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), under his leadership. He delegated his federal position to Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. On the other hand, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a veteran African nationalist had won dominance of the Western region where he became premier in 1954. Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe who had been in the youth movement with Awolowo since 1940 was the founder<sup>4</sup> of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC). He became Premier in the Eastern region in 1955. Unlike the other leaders, he organised his party on federal basis.

34. Thus, at this stage Nigeria had 3 main regions. Nigeria operated these 3 regional structures which of course created impregnable regional ethnic bases and three strong leaders. No particular group could however emerge to dominate the Federal Assembly. Democracy was rather expected to be preserved by careful balancing of each opposing group an act that has metamorphosed into zoning since 1997.

11. It should be noted that there existed an overriding danger. While the Eastern and Western Regions were politically ready for independence, the North was less enthusiastic. In the federal elections of 1959, the Action Group (AG) under Chief Awolowo and the NCNC under Azikiwe, the two dominant political entities of the South failed to put aside their old rivalries and seize the opportunity availed them. After a week of manoeuvring, an alliance emerged between the dominated NPC and the NCNC predominantly embraced by the Ibos. Balewa became Prime Minister and Azikiwe became Governor-General while Awolowo became the opposition leader in the Federal House of Representatives. However it soon became apparent that the Sardauna pulling his political string from the North was in full control. This, precisely was the political situation as at October 1960 when Nigeria became independent.

### **POST INDEPENDENCE ERA**

12. The first notable post-independence disturbance was over the defence agreement between Britain and Nigeria. This agreement was to afford both parties such assistance as may be necessary for defence and to confer measures so taken jointly or separately to ensure the fullest co-operation

between them for this purpose. This agreement was very unpopular especially among the opposition members of the National Assembly and students who registered their opposition through the press, demonstrations and well articulated public comments. The agreement was consequently revoked in December 1962.

13. **Alliance** The alliance between NCNC and NPC started crumbling after a few years. In 1962, the NPC under the Sarduana of Sokoto sought a fresh alliance with the West, choosing Chief SL Akintola. The crisis within the AG deepened and Akintola was in total disagreement with Obafemi Awolowo of the AG. This became an opportunity for the Federal Government, which was determined to set aside the AG, the main opposition, to cause more disaffection.

14. **Rivalry.** Factional rivalry was encouraged within the AG. This led to the exchange of blows and lawlessness in the Western Parliament. The Federal Government declared a state of emergency and an inquiry was made into some statutory corporations in the West, during which chief Awolowo and his party functionaries were arrested, detained and charged with treasonable felony. Meanwhile, Chief SL Akintola had been installed Premier of the West, while Chief Fadahunsi was appointed as new Governor. This was against the verdict handed down by the Privy Council which declared Alhaji S Adegbenro as legitimate Premier of the West. The Balewa government refused to enforce the judgement. In September 1965, Awolowo and his men were found guilty of the charges preferred against them and were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Towards the end of 1963, the Midwest was created out of the Western Region. Although, it

was true that the Midwest constituted a minority group in the West and it was also generally accepted by progressive Nigerians that there was the need for the creation of Midwest from the West. Incidentally, Midwest was the smallest of all the Region, hence denying them a regional status could have been seen as an act of political victimization, more so, the Federal Government announced that more regions would be created.

15. **The Census.** A very important factor that led to the Civil War was the 1962 Census. It was a delicate issue as it determined the number of parliamentary seats and thus the political balance between the North and the South. The Census was alleged to be riddled with malpractice and inflation of figures and so was cancelled. The second Census was organised in 1963 and the result was accepted with some reservations. Some never accepted the contentious figures that were released.

16. **Disaffection.** The Middle Belt's Northern minority started showing their disaffection and resentment against the NPC of the North. The Tivs, for example, felt alienated and did not hide their intolerance of the NPC. In 1960 and 1964 rioting, killing and arson swept through Tiv Division. Armed police and the army put the situation under control. This, instead of consultation and dialogue created further dissent among the minorities in the North.

17. **The 1964 Election.** The general election of 1964 caused one of the biggest crisis that led to the civil disorder of 1966. the ruling parties used all devices at their disposal to eliminate opponents. The new alliances of NPC, NNDP and MDF formed NNA while AG, NCNC and UMBC formed

UPGA. The NNA frustrated the UPGA candidates so that many of them in the North could not file their nominations. As a result, 67 NPC candidates were returned unopposed. UPGA called for the postponement of the election but the Balewa controlled Federal Government rejected the idea. As a result, the UPGA massively boycotted the elections and rejected the result as they lacked credibility. NPC accepted the result and went on to form a new government. There was a political stalemate and the President could not appoint the Prime Minister. In January 1965, the president however asked Balewa to form a new government. There was resistance all over the country and the government ignored the yearning of the masses.

18 **The 1965 Election in Western Region.** The Western Region became aggrieved having been robbed of their political rights. The Western Regional election of October 1965 was riddled with rigging and irregularities. Interfering publicly with the official results of election, to a brazen and shameful extent was rampant. Expectedly, the conduct of the election resulted in violence of immense proportions. There was sporadic fighting as houses, vehicles and other personal properties were burnt down by rioters. The intervention of the police could not stop the thuggery, hooliganism, arson and murder that spread throughout the West. It was obvious that a state of anarchy was imminent and only as severe and decisive action could restore normalcy. The arson was generally referred to as Operation Wetie’.

19. **The 1966 Coup.** The prevailing violent situation encouraged a core revolutionary officers in the NA to stage a coup against the Balewa Government with a view to changing the socio-political structure in the

country. The coup was intended to restructure the economic and education systems. On January 15, 1966, the coup took place, the outcome of which was a change of political balance in the country (Candidates are advised to consult appropriate text book for details).

- NPC - Northern People Congress.
- NNDP - Nigerian National Democratic Party.
- MDF - Midwest Democratic Forum.
- NNA - Nigerian National Alliance.
- AG - Action Group.
- NCNC - National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons.
- UMBC - United Middle Belt Congress.
- UPGA - United Progressive Grand Alliance.

### **THE IRONSI PERIOD (JANUARY JULY 1966)**

20. There is no doubt that the young revolutionaries had some good intentions, and they demonstrated their desire for a complete change by assassinating the most prominent politicians and leaders of the old military officers. The coup was widely acclaimed all over the country, including the North Region. The chaos of the coup itself is a special episode in Nigeria's military history. In the midst of the chaos General Aguiyi Ironsi took over as the Head of State and formed a government. However, due to the fact that the new government was not headed by one of the coup plotters it could not exploit the situation effectively. Ironsi was also in a dilemma as to what to do with the plotters who had been arrested and detained. This decision became an expensive error in due course.

21. Meanwhile, the North, having lost its political leader the Sardauna, appeared to be calm at first but their resentment soon began to manifest. Apart from the loss of the political idol, their power at the center had been eroded. More provoking still was the fact that the Ibos who lost just a few lives in the coup now appeared to dominate the political and social life of Nigeria. To worsen the whole affairs, Ironsi promulgated the unification decree No 34 which unified the civil service, abolished the regions and substituted them with provinces. The situation exploded on 19 May 1966, when rioting started in the North towns where Southerners were beaten up, their cars smashed and houses set ablaze. There and then, a mass exodus of Southerners from the North commenced.

22. In spite of the already volatile situation, the transfer and interchange of many army units, were authorized; 4 Bn in Ibadan and 1 Bn in Enugu were interchanged. In mid July 1966, Ironsi announced a proposed rotation of the military governors indicating an added - attempt to tighten his control of the nation. This action was viewed as one more step forwards a unitary system of government. In other words, his proposal was to abolish regionalism totally.

### **THE JULY 1966 COUP/GOWON ERA**

23. On the night of 28-29 July 1966, Ironsi with his Western region Governor Lt Col Fajuyi were killed in another military coup. A section of the army obviously had rebelled against his policies. Hundreds of Ibo rank and file soldiers were killed and for 3 days of confusion, the country had no central government.

24. Form the chaos of the second coup, a new leader Lt Col Gowon emerged. Gowon, a middle Belt officer who had no passionate regional loyalty addressed the nation. Among other things, he used his personal influence and tacts to stop the 'Arab' in the North, a term which literally means separation. At the same time, Ojukwu who had been appointed military governor in the east succeeded in persuading Gowon to remove Northern troops from the east and also to repatriate the surviving Ibo soldiers to the eastern Nigeria. He further made it abundantly clear that he would not accept Gowon's elevation to the post of the supreme Commander. Repatriation of the surviving Ibo soldiers to eastern region ultimately resulted in the East Becoming separate military base made up of almost hundred percent Eastern region soldiers. From this period in 1966, the entire East and the rest of the federation became two de facto entities.

25. Throughout August 1966, the Easterners fled home after another round of killings in the North. The Army was equally affected. The bond of loyalty and comradeship was thorn apart. Hatred, suspicion had spiralled viciously, killing all sense of security of life and property. Despite Gowon's appeal, the mutiny continued. In the East there was retaliatory action in which many northerners in the East were killed. Ojukwu by his action apparently became a military hero in the East. Gowon, in his effort to unite the country promised a 3-phase return to civil rule and released political detainees such as Chief Awolowo and Anthony Enahoro.

26. On August 9, 1966, Gowon called a meeting of the representatives of the Regions to find a peaceful solution to the posting of military personnel within their respective regions of origin. With the Eastern troops back home,

it was easy for the Eastern Region to further strengthen her military base and buttress its ambition to form an ethnic based army. The situation between Lagos and Enugu became more acrimonious and so the East refused to attend the AD Hoc Conference. Ojukwu thus ordered the expulsion of non Ibos from the East as he could no longer guarantee their safety. As the year ended, it was clear that both sides were arming for the inevitable an armed confrontation.

### **RECONCILIATION MOVES**

27. Various attempts were made in 1966 - 67 to unite the country and effect a lasting reconciliation on the part of the East and the rest of Nigeria.

Notable attempts were:

- a. The meeting of the Ad - hoc Committee on constitutional conference which was to resume on 23 October 1966. The Eastern delegations did not turn up, presumably because of the horror of killing of the Easterners in the North and also for fear of the presence of the Aburi Conference which was arranged by General Ankrah of Ghana on January 4 and 5, 1967. At the 2 day conference some important decisions were reached. Both Ojukwu and Gowon were present along with notable figures from all over the country.

### **THE ABURI CONFERENCE**

28. Under the auspices of General Ankrah of Ghana on 4th January, 1967 the Aburi Conference was convened to find a peaceful solution to Nigeria's problems. This was the first meeting of the military rulers since July 1966 with Ojukwu in attendance. The problem of authority was one of

the main subjects of discussion at Aburi, with Ojukwu claiming authority and control over the army in the East; and refusing Gowon's leadership on the basis that the mantle of leadership should have fallen on officers senior to Gowon. Though, there were different versions of what transpired at Aburi by both sides, some important decisions taken included:

- a. The immediate resumption of the Ad Hoc Committee.
  - b. The payment of salaries till 31 March, 1967, of all staff and employees of government and statutory corporations and any others who were forced to leave their posts as a result of the disturbance.
  - c. The setting up, in the mean time, of a committee to look into the problem of rehabilitation of displaced persons and the recovery of their property.
  - d. The exclusion of the use of force as a means of settling differences within the country.
  - e. The repealing of all decrees which tended to over - centralize power at the expense of Regional autonomy; This would be followed by the enactment of a decree before 21st of January to restore the Regions to their political positions prior to January 15, 1966.
29. Gowon rejected most of these decisions particularly those of payment of displaced persons and the reconvening of the Ad Hoc Committee. He went on to enact decree number 8 which gave him powers to declare a state of emergency in a region, irrespective of the wishes of the governor in that region.

## **CONSULTATIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

30. As the situation deteriorated, Ojukwu convened a meeting of the Advisory Committee of Chiefs and elders at Enugu on 26th May, 1967 to acquaint them with the latest developments and seek their advice. He presented 3 possible solutions to the crisis:

- a. To accept the terms of Gowon and therefore submit to domination.
- b. To continue the present stalemate and drift.
- c. Ensure the survival of the people by asserting their autonomy.

## **MANDATE TO OJUKWU**

31. On 27 May 1967, the Consultative Assembly mandated Ojukwu to declare Eastern Region a free sovereign and independent state by name and title of the 'Republic of Biafra'. Lagos reaction to this was swift and immediate. Gowon at once announced a new Constitution for Nigeria based upon the division of the existing 4 regions into 12 states. The Eastern Region was then split into 3 states: Rivers, East Central and South Eastern States.

32. **Leaders of Thought.** In each region, a council of leaders of thought was selected who deliberated on national issues and advised the government on what step to take. These well - meaning Nigerians and friends of Nigeria met regularly in their respective regional headquarters to find solutions to the country's political problems and constitutional impasse. The Eastern Region's Consultative Assembly was however regarded as a sort of 'Biafran Parliament'. Though politicians, lawyers, trade unionists,

members of all the major professions and traditional chiefs and elders were represented, those in the East were selected by Ojukwu himself and resolutions were alleged to have been arrived with a consensus before deliberations.

### **THE SECESSION**

33. On 27 May, 1967, diplomats and journalists in Enugu were summoned to the state House. Ojukwu proclaimed the territory and region known as Eastern Region together with continental shelves and territorial waters as an independent sovereign state under the name and title of the 'Republic of Biafira', amidst demonstrations and serious agitation for war against Nigeria. Thus the seed of discord had been sown and Nigeria was thrown into a state of chaos that eventually led to 30 months fratricidal war which claimed thousands of innocent lives.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **PREPARATION FOR WAR AND OPERATION UNICORD** **AN OVERVIEW OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR**

1. The Nigerian Civil War began in 1967 as a police action because it was felt that in a few weeks the war will be over. However, as the war progressed it became obvious that some more deliberate measures were required if the war was to be brought to an end within a reasonable period of time. The initial aim was to capture Enugu since it was generally believed that once Enuge fell, the war will be over. However, this perception was proved wrong in due course.

2. The initial effort to capture Obudu, Ogoja, Garkem and Nsukka code name OP UNICORD was carried out in order to create a favourable environment for the eventual capture of Enugu. Enugu eventually fell on 4 Oct 1967. After the fall of Enugu, there was an unexpected lull in operations. The invasion of the Midwest Region and part of the West by the Biafrans on 19 August, 1967, forced the Nigerian forces to embark on OP TORCH. The aim of the OP TORCH was to flush out the Biafrans. Having liberated the Midwest Region and part of the West, 2 Infantry Div command wanted to consolidate the gains by attempting to capture Onitsha through an operation across River Niger at Asaba. The 3 attempts made ended in disaster.

3. The Nigerian forces knew that without controlling the waterways in the South East (SE) the Biafran would always be assured of suitable logistics with which to prosecute the war. The 3 MCDO commanded by Col

Benjamin Adekunle was tasked to capture Bonny, Calabar, Opobo and Portharcourt. The initial success in the capture of these major towns turned the tide of the war against the ambition of Colonel Ojukwu. The plan to capture Owerri, Aba and Umuahia Code-named OP OAU did not work out smoothly, 16 Brigade which had earlier captured Owerri was encircled by the Biafran forces. The situation was so bad that troops had to be maintained by air supply. Although the Brigade was able to withdraw, they however suffered a lot of casualties. Three attempts were made to capture Owerri. The Federal troops captured and held Owerri twice and on both occasions, the Biafrans recaptured the town it was only in January 1970 that Owerri was decisively captured. With the capture of Owerri, Amaraka on the Okigwe also fell putting the Federal troops within the range of 7 miles (12 kms) to the Biafrans tactical Headquarters at Zisu. On January 11, having sensed that the situation was hopeless, Ojukwu with a handful of his officials took off on a supposedly “peace mission” from Uli Airstrips leaving the army under General Effiong, who surrendered to Col Olusegun Obasanjo, representing the Federal Government.

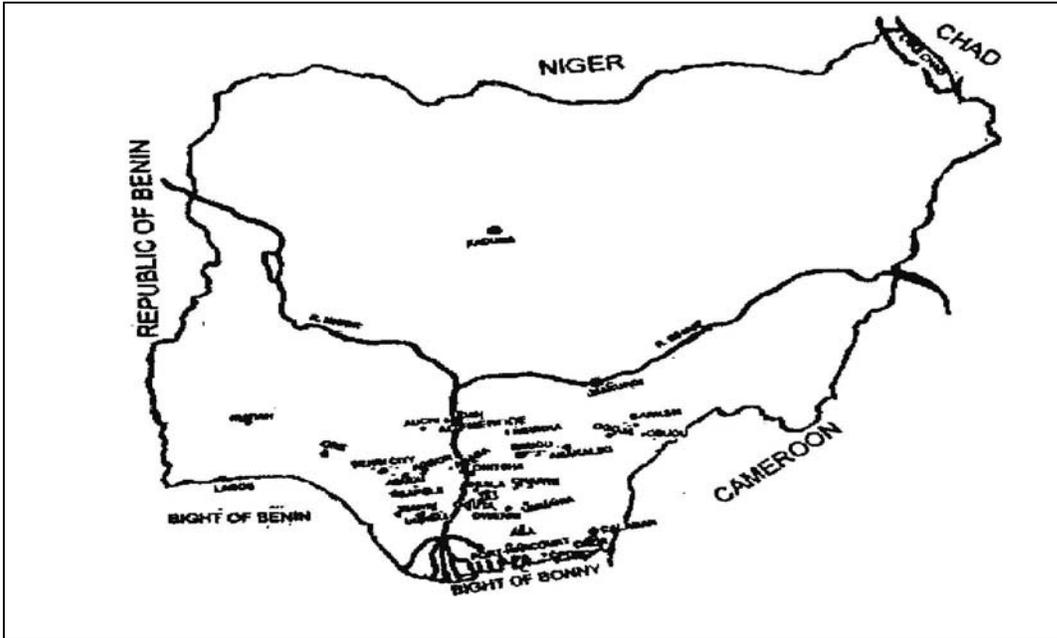
### **PREPARATION FOR WAR-NIGERIA**

4. By October 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence from Britain, only the Army and Navy existed. The Airforce was not established until 1965. At independence, the Nigerian Army had about 7,500 men and about 50 Nigerian Officers. The British officers who controlled the Army numbered 228 as at January 1960. It was indeed the move towards independence and particularly the immediate post-independence era that saw the Nigerianization of the officer corps of the Army.

5. In terms of structure, the Army was made up of 2 brigades namely; 1 Brigade at Kaduna and 2 Brigade at Apapa. 1 Brigade had 2 Battalion at Ikeja. There was also the Lagos Garrison Organisation at Abalti Barracks at Yaba. All of the Army was under the command of a General Officer Commanding who until February 1965 was a Briton, Major General GB Welby-Everald. The Nigerianization of the Army saw the replacement of all the Commanding Officers of the battalions with Nigerian Officers by 1963 and all staff appointments at Army and Brigade Headquarters by 1964.

6. Other changes that took place in the Army before 1966 included the creation of two arty batteries and an additional recce squadron. There was also the creation of the Federal Guards Company and an additional rifle company for each of the battalions to form the nucleus of a proposed 6 Battalion. With all these changes, the Army had only increased to 7,186 by 1963 in terms of men and remained largely the same till 1966 when the crisis started. The officer corps however saw an increase from a total of 50 in 1960 to 336 combatant and 181 non-combatant officers by January 1966. Also significant in the post-1960 period was the creation of an Ordnance Factory, now Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) based at Kaduna to produce arms and ammunition.

**FIGURE 2: POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING IMPORTANT TOWNS WHERE THE CIVIL WAR WAS CONDUCTED**



7. In terms of battle experience, the Army had very little or none except Internal Security duties during the Southern Cameroon crisis of 1959, the Tiv riots of 1960,61 and the United Nations Peace keeping Operations in Congo and Tangayika (now Tanzania). All these, however, hardly approximated to battlefield experience. The Civil War was, therefore, to provide for the Nigerian Army its first real test of battlefield experience.

8 The declaration of secession made war not only imminent but also inevitable. By May 1967, preparations for war were set in motion. At this time on the Nigerian side 4 of the 6 regular Infantry battalions of the Army were under the command of 1 Brigade NA. Mobilization of ex-service men was ordered, leading to the formation of 4 battalions-20, 21,22 and 23.

9. The Army also embarked upon recruitment from personnel of Local Government Police and NPF. Citizens were trained in civil defence duties, and plans were made for evacuating big towns against heavy air raids. Delivery of normal arms and equipment on order for the Army in 1966 was hastened. Other than the available stock, there was no special provision available for mobilization. Even a few trusted officials both in Lagos and Kaduna were saddled, in addition to their normal duties, with the responsibility for obtaining arms, ammunition and equipment for the prosecution of the war. Local and International gunrunners and middlemen were also employed in the desperate rush to prepare properly for war.

10. This haphazard and unreliable system of procurement and provision characterized the entire period of the war. The plan and concept of the war at the initial stage was to use troops located in the North and they were to be supplied from Kaduna. Nigerian sources of arms and ammo were Britain, Italy and West Germany. However, it must be stated that most Western powers including Britain were initially unwilling to supply Nigeria the needed arms and ammunition. Nigeria had to turn to USSR for its initial supplies and it was not until later that Britain obliged Nigeria's request for arms.

### **BIAFRA**

11. On the Biafran side, the preparation for war was put into high gear as soon as troops of non-Eastern origin had withdrawn from Enugu in August 1966. Training commenced for both officer cadets, who were mainly lecturers and students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka and also for

normal recruits. The training plan at this stage envisaged an all-out war. By this time Ojukwu had already secured arms and ammunition from French, Spanish and Portuguese sources while he had assurances of mercenary support by both France and South Africa.

12. A conference of senior Army officers was held in Enugu, during which the best possible ways of establishing, formally, the Eastern Command was discussed. The conference also recommended the formation of 2 new infantry battalions to be called 7 and 8 battalions. They were to be based in Nsukka and Port Harcourt, respectively.

13. The military build - up started after the departure of non Easterners from 1st Battalions Enugu. In an interview with Odumegwu Ojukwu, in 1967, he said:

*Quietly I build. If you know it, I am proud and my officers are proud that here in the East, we possess the biggest army in Africa. I am no longer speaker as an under dog. I am speaking from a position of power. It is not my intention to unleash destruction, which my army can unleash. It is not my intention to fight unless I am attacked. If I am attacked, I will take good care of the aggressor.*

240 soldiers of Eastern origin had been left at 1st Battalion Enugu and this formed the basis of the Biafran Army. These were reinforced by Igbo officers and soldiers returning to the East as well as civilians who were badly hurt by their treatment in parts of the North during the so called "ARABA".

14. The 7th Battalion was tasked with the defence of the Northern border while the 8th defended the South. The 1st Battalion was in reserve with the

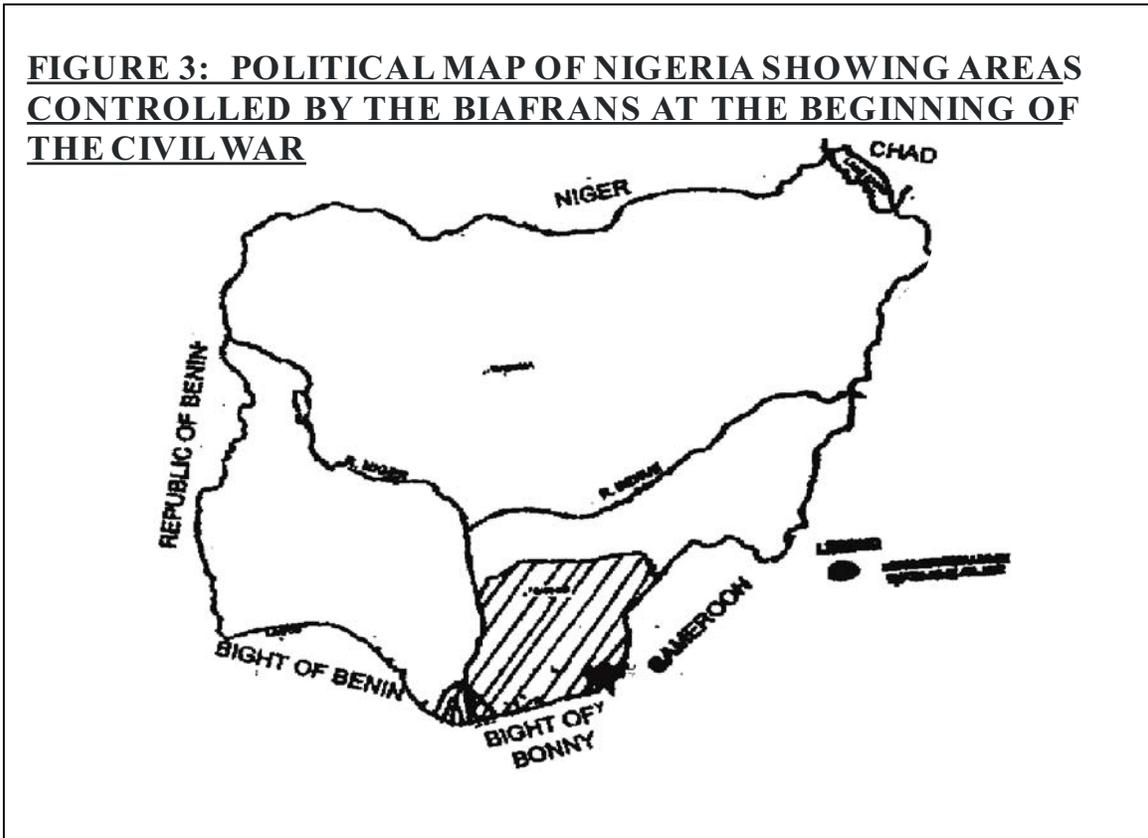
additional task of defending the Niger River line to the West.

72. A Training Depot was also established inside Enugu Prisons to ensure some secrecy. An officer cadet school was also proposed for establishment on the outskirts of Enugu. Finding recruits was no problem for the Army as a result of the feelings of the people. Hundreds of people turned out daily at the 1st Battalion Barracks for recruitment.

15. Before the outbreak of the war, all large markets and shops within the Eastern Region were fully stocked up and what they held appeared inexhaustible. However, at the outbreak of the war the government created civil administrative directorates to cater for both the military and the entire civil population. Foremost among these were the Food, Transport and Clothing Directorates.

16. Before the outbreak of hostilities in July 1967, Ojukwu had created 4 additional battalions and 52 Brigade comprising 8 and 9 Battalions which were commanded by Lt Cols Alexander Madiebo and Eze, respectively. These units were deployed as follows:

**FIGURE 3: POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING AREAS CONTROLLED BY THE BIAFRANS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CIVIL WAR**



- a. 7 Battalion of Nsukka with A Company at Okuta, responsible for the 80 mile Okuta-Onitsha stretch; B Company at Enugu-Ezike, responsible for the 30 Mile stretch covering Okuta to Obolo-Ake and C Company, responsible for the defence of the communication lines between the main Bn and a platoon located at Eha Amufu for its defence. .
- b. 8 Battalion was deployed to the south of Port Harcourt with one company each at Ahoada, Calabar and Oron and a platoon at Bonny.

- c. The original 1 Battalion at Enugu was kept in depth and to secure the Biafran capital, Enugu.
18. 4 Battalion was forming up at Abakaliki and Calabar when the war commenced. Biafra also had an Airforce made up of 2 old planes, B26 and B 25 as well as 3 new helicopters fitted with machine guns. The weapons in the arsenal of the army were described as few machine guns, rifles, 6x8mm and 6x3mm mortar tubes inherited from the NA. The Navy had some patrol boats and a ship NNS IBADAN acquired from the Nigerian Fleet.
19. Apart from the earlier preparations, Ojukwu, among other things decided to use the following tactics to supplement his preparatory efforts:
- a. Delay the military phase of the campaign until the start of the Rainy season when rebel soldiers will have advantage of supply especially food.
  - b. Development of a contingency plan for importing arms by air droops or reinforced roads should the federal troops succeed in destroying the Uli airstrip.
  - c. Created the militia and the Biafran Organization of Freedom Fighters (BOFF). The role of the militia was to provide reinforcement for the regular troops, assist in rear administration; garrison captured areas and to educate the people on why Biafra was fighting. BOFF on the other hand was to infiltrate enemy lines for sabotage and espionage activities.
  - d. Continuous count on international public opinion to restrain Britain or other Western powers from intervening with military support for the Federal Government.

- e. Promoting dissension on the Federal side through radio, newspapers and the foreign press.

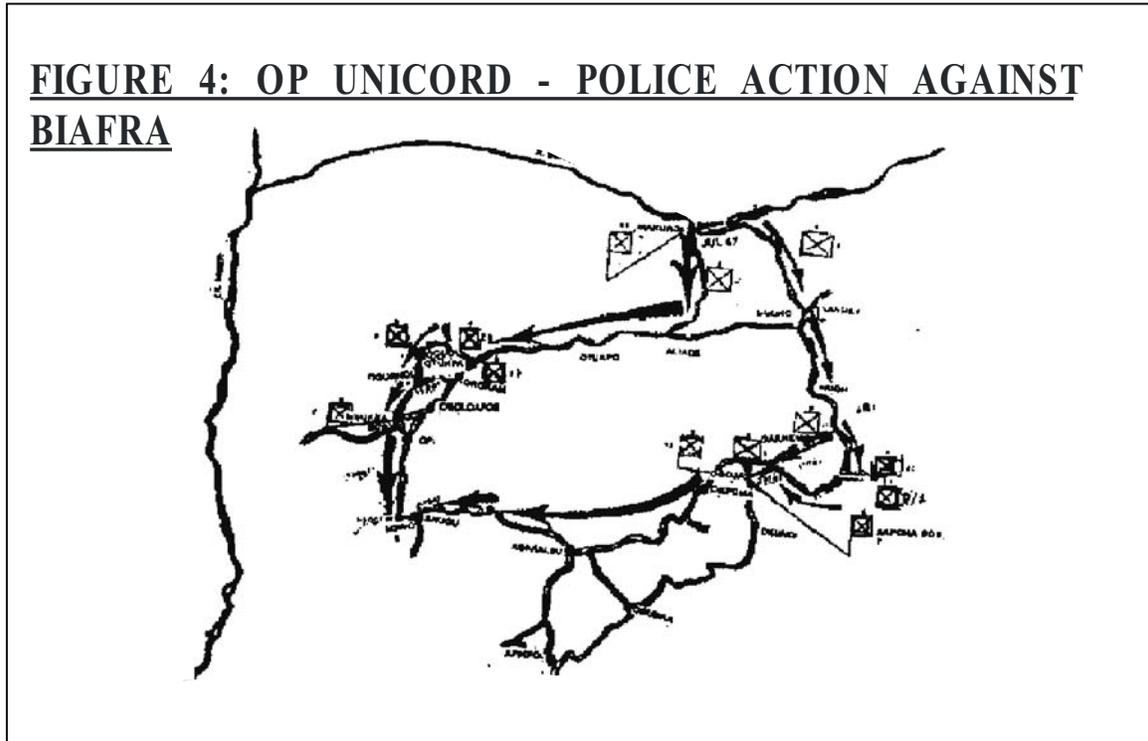
### **THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY AIMS OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR**

20. The political aim of the war was to keep Nigeria one while the military aim was to defeat the Biafran forces.

### **DESIGN FOR BATTLE - NIGERIA**

21. Nigeria in all her actions tended to have underestimated the threshold of the crisis. The general perception of the Biafran Army was a bunch of ragtag army that could be crushed at any time. This tendency was reflected in Gowon's decision to take "*police action*" on the rebellious Eastern Nigeria. Indeed the appreciation carried out saw the clash of the proverbial *giant* against *lilliput*. Its plan was therefore very optimistic and highly ambitious.

22. Army Headquarters had an operational plan which envisaged a war that would be waged in 4 phases, culminating in the capture of Enugu within one month. The phases were:

**FIGURE 4: OP UNICORD - POLICE ACTION AGAINST BIAFRA**

- a. Capture of Nsukka.
- b. Capture of Ogoja.
- c. Capture of Abakaliki.
- d. Capture of Enugu.

23. In fact, Col Hassan Katsina predicted that the war would be over in just 48 hours. In all the 4 Phases, 1 Area Command (HQ in Kaduna) was to be the fighting forces. The 2 Area Command in Ibadan was earmarked for Internal Security Operations. Similarly, 4 Area Command in Benin was earmarked for the defence of Mid-west in addition to border protection. The Lagos Garrison Organization from which the 3 Marine Commando Division was later formed was armed for the defence of Lagos.

24. The Federal assessment of the East in terms of men under arms and equipment did not give Nigerian Army Headquarter much concern. What was probably underestimated was the immediate total mobilization capacity of the east to fight on against severe odds. By 24th Jan 1967, 1 Area Command moved its Headquarters to Markurdi ready for immediate operations.

### **BIAFRA**

25 Ojukwu was quite aware of his strength and limitations. However, his strategy was to hold out as long as possible to enable him swing the Nigerian Public and international opinions in Biafra" favour. Besides he was also prepared to trade some territory for time to enable Biafra conclude its recruitment, training and development. Although, not apparent at the time, the grand deign was to secede where possible, but where secession was not feasible, he would negotiate a more vital role for the people of Eastern Region in the affairs of the Nigerian Nation.

26. Accordingly, Biafra went in to fight a defensive battle on the frontiers where Nigeria was most likely to strike i.e Ogoja, Nsukka to Enugu.

### **OPERATION UNICORD**

27. **General.** OPERATION UNICORD was the action designed to crush the Biafran forces defending Ogoja and Nsukka to ease the capture of Enugu. It took place in July 1967.

28. **Situation.** Tension between Nigeria and Biafra was at an all-time

high and it was obvious that an armed confrontation was now inevitable. Both sides were trading insults and propaganda designed to psyche up their respective civil population for war. Movement of troops had begun on both sides.

29. **Aim.** The aim of OP UNICORD was to capture Ogoja and Nsukka.

30. **Forces Involved.**

a. **Nigeria.** 1 Area Command consisting of 2 Brigades, i.e 1 and 2 Brigades made of 3 battalions each.

b. **Biafra** 1 Battalion commanded by Maj Amadi was deployed in defensive positions at Obudu, Garkem and Akpoha Bridge, 12 miles from Ogoja.

31. **Plan.** OP UNICORD was to be launched on 2 fronts. 1 Bridge was tasked to capture Ogugu and Nsukka and to explore South of Nsukka, while 2 Bridge was to capture Garkem, Obudu and Ogoja.

32. **Conduct.** The attack on Garkem was launched at 0530 hrs on Jul 67. Two battalions, i.e. 2 and 20 Battalions advancing on two sides right and left of the main road Garkem Afikpo led the assault. There was arty, mortar and armour support. The Biafran companies were no match for the superior Nigerian side. They had neither arty nor anti-tank weapons. The biafran troops came to realize late that they ought to be dug-in in trenches. When the Nigerian attack was launched, their trenches had not been fully developed. By last light on the second day of the offensive, Garkem fell to the Federal troops.

33. **Capture of Obudu.** While the battle of Garkem raged on a similar one was going on at Obudu. Though the Biafran Company defending Obudu was fairly experienced, they could not withstand the heavy bombardment mounted by 20 Battalion. Reasons for the feeble resistance of the Biafrans could be traced to lack of adequate reinforcement, lack of communication and appropriate administrative support. In Obudu, the first two Biafran companies that arrived were deployed in a defensive role at Ikpoma Bridge and Ikom. However, before the companies could settle down and prepare their defences, the Federal Troops were already at Ogoja. On 12 Jul 67 Ogoja was attacked by the Federal Troops. The town was fully occupied by troops of the Recce Corps and Army Engineers who successfully rebuilt the demolished Ikpoma Bridge.

34. **Reasons for Biafran Defeat at Garkem, Obudu and Ogoja.** The Biafrans were defeated for the following reasons:

- a. Biafran did not have enough trained infantry.
- b. They depended mostly on volunteers and the best weapons issued to them were machetes.
- c. The Biafran could not withstand Nigerian artillery, armour and machine guns.
- d. There was no effective communication net-work. All they relied on was the knowledge of the terrain and this made command, control and communication difficult. Fighting individually and without communication, the companies naturally fell like pack of cards.

35. **The Capture of Nsukka.** 1 brigade was tasked to capture Nsukka

which was defeated by 7 Battalion of the Biafran Army. The advance to Nasukka was led by 21 Battalion which met sporadic resistance along the way. At Oturkpa, the Federal Troops advance was halted by air raids from the dreaded Biafran B-52 Bombers. These bombers became a real threat and menace until they were knocked out at Enugu. The Federal Forces continued their advance and by 13 July 1967 were only miles away from Nsukka. Although, the Biafrans put up series of resistance, Nsukka fell to the Federal Troops on 26 July 1967.

36. **Lesson Learnt.** Lessons learnt from OP UNICORD include the following:

- a. The need for adequate preparation before going to war was brought out. Although both sides were not really prepared, Biafra was the least prepared for war.
- b. The need for well-prepared defences the Biafrans realised little too late that they ought to be dug-in in trenches.
- c. Effective fire support greatly influences the outcome of most operations. Mortar and artillery fire support gave the Federal troops the needed decisive edge.
- d. The effect of the air power on day operations, the B-52 Bombers became a real nuisance until they were knocked out of action at Enugu.
- e. Communications as a key to command and control was amply demonstrated.

## **THE CAPTURE OF ENUGU**

37. **Situation.** OP UNICORD was designed to create an enabling combat environment for the capture of Enugu especially as it was strongly believed that the fall of Enugu would bring the war to an end. It should be noted that preparations were on for the capture of Enugu when in a surprise move the Biafran forces through series of connivance and lightening moves invaded the neutral Mid-West on 9 August 1967. This strategic move compelled the Federal Forces to open a new front using 2 infantry Division and declare total war on Biafra instead of the so called Police action that was the concept at the commencement of hostilities.

38. **Aim.** The aim of the capture of Enugu was to bring the secession to an end.

39. **Forces Involved.**

a **Nigeria**

(1) 1 brigade Commanded by Col TY Danjuma consisting of:

(a) 6 Battalions.

(b) Additional 2000 men out of which one battalion was formed and replacement of casualties of 1000 men reserved.

(2) 2 Brigade with some battalions detached to 1 Brigade in reserve.

- b. **Biafra.**
    - 1. A depleted and retreating 53 Brigade.
    - 2. 10,000 able bodied men armed with machetes from all parts of Biafra who almost constituted nuisance because feeding them became a real logistics burden. These men had no prior military training and were probably the first to dash out of Enugu when the echoes of gun shots started sounding.
40. **PIAN**
- a. **Nigeria.** Danjuma's plan was to advance from Nsukka to Enugu on 2 Axis simultaneously up to 9th mile Corner and Eke from where the advance would be along one major axis to capture Enugu. The Federal troops thought that Enugu had been heavily fortified and was therefore almost impregnable.
  - b. **Biafra.** Biafra had no concrete plan to defend Enugu. They relied more on providence and thought they could exploit lapses on the Nigerian side. This turned out to be a fallacy.
41. **Conduct.** The advance from Nsukka to Enugu commenced on 12 Sep 1967. Two battalions, 21 and 22 Bns led on both axes respectively while 5 Bn followed in between them. Villages such as Ikolo, Ogbede and Ukehe were captured enroute. The progress of the advance was slow and difficult as fleeing Biafrans created effective obstacles using craters and abatis across the roads. By 26 Sep Enugu came under artillery fire from Ukama. On Oct 1 1967, 9th mile coner fell to a combine force of 5 and 22 Bns. Milikin Kill proved as difficult for the Biafrans to defend as it was for

the Federal troops to attack. The desertion of Enugu by civilians made it an unwholesome habit for soldiers. By 3 October 1967, Milikin hill was completely dominated by 20, 21 and 22 Bns. The following day 4 October the three battalions entered Enugu town ship. The Biafrans fled Enugu leaving large quantities of combat supplies behind. Ojukwu escaped being captured alive at Enugu, an incident that would have surely ended the war. In the confusion that ensued when the Federal troops entered Enugu, Ojukwu who was sleeping had apparently been abandoned by his personal aids and guards. He woke up to find out that he was not only alone but also surrounded by the Federal troops. Who would have thought that Ojukwu was there!!! Ojukwu completely in a disguise and on his way out of State House, the Federal troops who surrounded the State House waved him goodbye as he cleverly rode into safety. Thus, ended the capture of Enugu on a dramatic note of a town that was supposed to be impregnable.

42. **Lessons.** The following lessons were appropriately brought out during the capture of Enugu:

- a. The need for adequate intelligence before any operation, the Federal troops had only scanty knowledge about the defence of Enugu. If intelligence was current, they could have walked into Enugu after Nsukka was captured some 4 months earlier.
- b. The need for thorough planning and adequate preparations. From all indications, there were no accurate plans let alone preparations for the Biafrans defence of Enugu.
- c. The futility of desperate measures! The adhoc recruitment of 10,000 able bodied men created more logistic problems than contribute anything to the defence of Enugu. They are probably the

first to dash out of Enugu.

d. The need for concentration of forces. Biafrans had by this time split its forces and some had gone to the Midwest for OP TORCH thus, reducing its capability to defend the capital of Biafra.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE BIAFRAN INVASION OF MIDWEST

#### PREAMBLE

1. The 1 Inf Div operations started on 6 July 1967 with the outbreak of the war and by the end of the month the Div recorded some major victories with the capture of Enugu Ezikwe, Obollo Afor, Nsukka as well as other major objectives as Eha Amufu and Obollo Eke in East Central State and Obudu, Garkem and Ogoja in South Eastern State. The 3 MCDO Division followed up by successfully launching and taking Bonny on 26 July 67. This feat by the Federal Troops achieved within 3 weeks of the start of the police action no doubt disorganized the Biafran Forces and dealt a big blow on Ojukwu's propaganda that no army in black African could subdue Biafra.

2. With Biafra facing sudden, swift and devastating defeat, the stage was now set for a desperate and precipitate action. This action was to come in the form of an ambitious plan to change the dynamics of the war by invading the Midwest Region and pushing ahead into the West. The ultimate aim was to buy time and use captured territory as a bargaining chip in case both sides agreed on a negotiated settlement.

3. **Background.** The infiltration of the Biafrans into the Mid-West opened a third front in the civil war for which the Nigerian Army was ill-prepared. The policy of the Army when the war started was, out of respect for the view of the Mid-West Government to leave the state as a buffer zone and to conduct operations from the North and South. While the Federal

Government maintained and ran the Army in the Mid-West, it had no operational control over it. Some NA officers and Federal officials openly criticised this state of affairs. The invasion of the state by Biafrans vindicated their stand.

4. **Plan.** The plan to invade Midwest was shrouded in secrecy presumably to avoid leakage. Even the Biafran Army Commander Lt Col Hilary Njoku was according to Madiebo not aware of the planned invasion until the Biafran Troops were in Benin. The Biafran Army was to mount a lightning operation to capture the entire Mid-Western Nigeria, Ibadan and probably Lagos. Using a force of a Brigade plus, it was planned to move on three main axes north, south and west, starting from Onisha. The Northern forces establish at Auchi and exploited northward having detached a force at Idah to protect their right flank and block the Federal troops line of communication to Nsukka. The overall task of the northern force was to block the North flank to enable the main troops penetrate into Ibadan and Lagos.

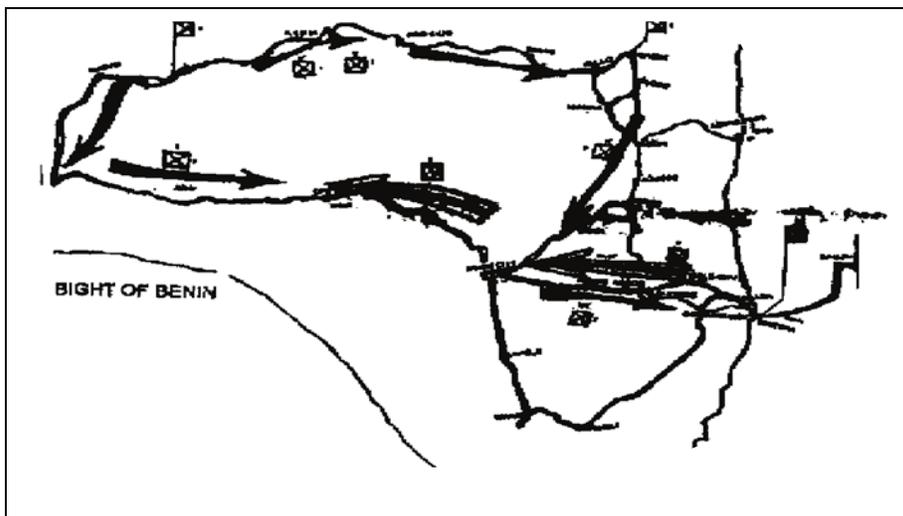
5. **Southern Force.** A southern force was expected to move to garrison the main coastal towns of Warri, Sapele and Ugheli. They would foil the Federal troops attempts at landing their forces in these areas. This force would consist mainly of Militia men. The force would advance to Benin and Ibadan through Ore and Okitipupa. If they succeeded they would also have the responsibility of moving on to Lagos, after dispatching a small force to blow and hold the Niger Bridge at Jebba.

6. **Conduct.** By last light on 8 Aug all Biafran troops taking part in this

operation, were already concentrated at Onisha. They came under the command of Col Banjo. By the early hours of 9 Aug, the troops crossed the Niger Bridge and the race to the various objectives began. Benin was taken early that morning without a single loss of life. Banjo ignored the importance of maintenance of momentum as a principle of war and chose to remain in Benin to 'reorganise' his troops who had not fired a single shot. A week later, the Biafrans were on the move again, and by 18 Aug, they were at Ore. It was the high-water mark of the Biafran military fortunes.

7. **Reasons for Biafrans success.** The success of Biafran forces was never due to her military capability or competence. It was also never due to any major operation either. The operation was carried out by about 1,000 men poorly armed and without any reasonable training. Why then was it easy to capture Midwestern state without any iota of resistance from the Federal side? The following could be adduced as the reasons for the Biafran's success at this stage of the war.

**FIGURE 6: OP TORCH AND THE LIBERATION OF MIDWEST**



- a. The deployment of the Federal Troops was faulty with the bulk of the Army in the North.
- b. The federal line of communication had become so extended stretching over 1,000 kms from Ogoja to Bonny.
- c. The defence in and around the West was weak and as such did not offer any resistance to the Biafran troops who appreciated the situation and concluded that immediate reinforcement of the Federal Troops would be difficult.
- d. Most importantly, the Biafran invasion was supported by a carefully timed coup. Midwestern Ibo officers who dominated the state's small army had prepared the ground for Biafrans and literally opened the gate and let them in. In this circumstance, the military Governor of Midwest, Lt Col DA Ekor could not do anything but tactically disappeared from the scene and arranged to negotiate with Col Banjo, the Biafran Commander.
- e. The Nigerian soldiers in the Midwest lacked leadership and were confused by the conflicting orders from Ibo and non-Ibo speaking officers.

## **PLAN FOR THE LIBERATION OF MIDWEST**

8. **Need for Reorganisation.** The fall of Midwest and part of the Western Region to the Biafran forces as aforesaid was not due to the military capability of the Biafran soldiers. Although there were no major operations on the part of the Biafrans, yet the capture had clearly indicated that a strong force would be required to clear the West and Mid West of Biafran forces.

9. **Preparation for Liberation and Formation of 2 Infantry**

**Division.** 2 Inf Div was formed and given responsibility to clear Biafrans from part of the West and large area of the Midwest. The men of the Division were hurriedly collected in Lagos and consisted mainly of office clerks, radio operators, physical training instructors and recruits from Ikeja with only a few days training. The Division was made up of 6 Bde Commanded by Maj Akinrinade, 8 bde Commanded by Lt Col Aisida and 7 Bde Commanded by Lt Col Ally. Col Murtala Mohammed was the GOC.

10. **Plan.** The Plan of the Division was to advance on Benin from two directions. 7 bde was to clear Ore in the Western end and advance from there to Benin. The other two brigades 6 and 8 on Benin along the Ibilo and Ososo Axes.

11. **Conduct.** 6 Bde comprised 11, 61 and 63 Bns. 61 Bn captured Ososo. 8 Bde remained in Okene and followed 6 Bde in series of swift movements until Auchu was captured and two brigades met at Igara. From Ehor, the two brigades continued the advance on one axis which took the Division through Agbede, Ekpoma to Ikoba Hill, leading to the capture of Benin on 22 Sep 1967.

12. **The Ore Axis.** After clearing Ore and getting to Benin, 7 Brigade under the command of Lt Col Ally led the advance from Benin to Abudu. Having been halted at the Ossiomu River bridge at Abudu which had been demolished, they were forced to halt while 6 Brigade took over the lead. Taking a southern detour via Eke and Owa Atetro and thereby surprising the Biafran forces from the rear; 6 brigade attacked Agbor. Panic set in among

the Biafrans, running in all directions for safety while most of them fell into Federal hands.

13. **Capture of Umunede and Other Areas.** 7 Brigade moved up along the detour of 6 brigade and continued to lead the advance from Agbor to Umunede. Having entered the Ibo speaking areas, the Federal troops started encountering hostility from the civilian population. However, areas such as onichugbo, Ohwashukwu, Ibusa and Issele Ukwu and Okpanan were all captured en-route before taking Asaba.

14. It was emphasised here that Murtala's directive to 8 Brigade to cross the river Niger at Asaba did not go down well with the brigade Commander Lt Col Aisida. He saw the whole exercise as suicidal and therefore disagreed with the GOC over the crossing.

### **THE ILL-FATTED CROSSING OF THE RIVER NIGER AT ASABA**

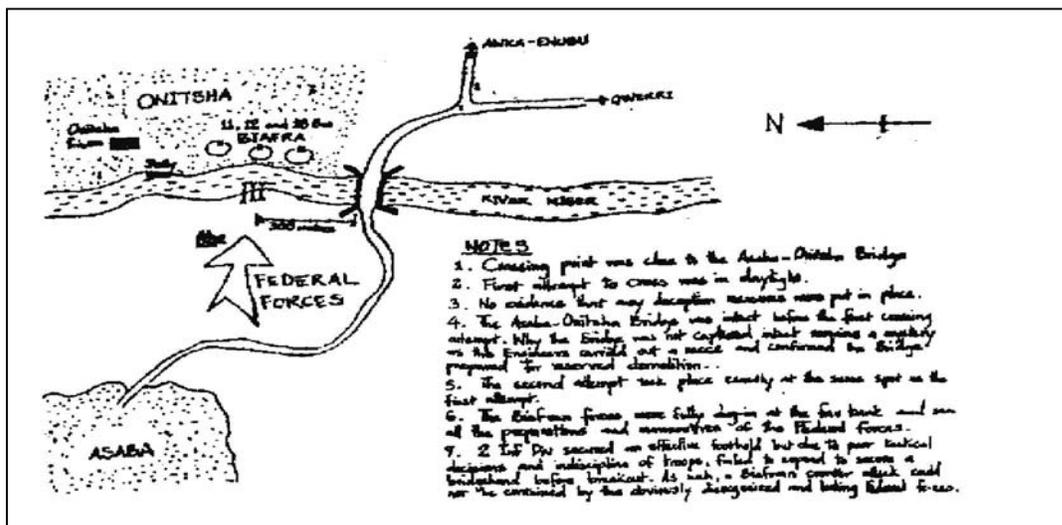
15. The effort of the Federal troops to clear the Midwest of Biafran forces went on quite smoothly and rapidly. Within 6 weeks all the areas around Ore, Benin, Agbor, Isele-Ukwu, Umunede, Okpanam, Onitichugbo as well as Ogwashiukwu were in Federal hands. Although Asaba was captured after a bitter struggle, the GOC 2 Infantry Division was ready and willing to carry out a bounce crossing at the River Niger to press home his advantage.

16. While conditions for carrying out a river crossing operation appeared favourable it was not a part of the strategy plans at Army headquarters at the time. Indeed, the AHQ made it known that 2 Inf Div should rest and replenish before taking on a major crossing operation. Besides, AHQ though

that a more deliberate plan was required to carry out such a crossing. However, the Commander on the ground felt otherwise. He wanted to exploit an obvious advantage and maintain the winning streak. It is even believed that efforts could have been channelled towards capturing the bridge in fact if only adequate appreciation had been made.

17. The decision to go ahead with the crossing has been a subject of debate as well as criticism as to who was actually in charge of operations, AHQ or field Commanders. However, considering the near "independence" of the Field Commanders at the time, it is hardly surprising that the field Commander could go ahead with an operation that lacked higher headquarters blessing.

**FIGURE 7: SKETCH SHOWING THE DISPOSITION OF FORCES FOR 2 INF DIV RIVER CROSSING IN OCT 67**



18. The long line of communication coupled with the need to maintain a replenished force may have informed AHQ indisposition to an immediate

crossing. Again, in spite of the failed attempt at crossing the River Niger, no serious effort was ever made to sanction the GOC 2 Mech Div for his attitude.

19. In spite of the prevailing relationship between GOC 2 Mech Div and AHQ, plans were concluded to carry out a crossing just beside the Niger Bridge.

### **THE RIVER OBSTACLE**

20. The River Niger by all consideration is a major obstacle between Asaba and Onitsha. The width of the river varies from 1-1.8km from bank to bank. The depth of water varies from 0.1m to about 7 metres at the deepest points deepening on the season. Seasonal sandbanks exist at various points along the river. A truss bridge which existed at the time of cross was still intact although it had been prepared for several demolitions. The Onitsha end was on a higher ground so it was easy to see movements on the Asaba side from Onitsha. There was a ferry service cross the river. There also existed a prison on the North Western corner of the bridge about 700 meters from the Jetty on the Onitsha side. Thus 2 Inf Div faced a formidable obstacle made more difficult because the Biafrans had prepared defences on the Onitsha end of the obstacle.

### **AIM**

21. The aim of the river crossing operation across the River Niger at Asaba-Onitsha was to maintain the momentum of the advance of 2 Inf Div, capture Onitsha and continue further operations.

## **FORCES INVOLVED**

### 22. **Nigeria.**

- a. 7,8 and 9 Inf Bdes.
- b. NAF.

### 23 **Biafra.**

- a. 11.12 and 18 Bns (depleted).
- b. BAF.

## **PLAN**

24. The Plan was to secure a foothold, expand it to a bridgehead, have a breakout and continue the advance. The Biafrans planned to inflict heavy casualties on the Federal troops to slow down or even halt the advance in order to prolong the war. The capture of Onitsha would be a big boost to the war effort if the crossing was successfully carried out.

## **PREPARATION**

25. **Nigeria.** 2 Inf Div made very little preparation for the crossing. There was a general assumption that a mere attempt to CROSS THE RIVER NIGER WILL SCARE AWAY THE Biafrans. As it were, no serious efforts were made for concealment, deception, alternative crossing points, etc, which are prerequisites for success in river crossing operations.

26. **Biafra.** Biafra had well prepared defences with bunkers and good communication trenches. The Asaba Onitsha Bridge was prepared for reserved demolition and good look out posts were established at vantage

points. The Biafrans had an effective and active monitoring system about all that were happening at the Asaba end thus were fully aware of 2 Inf Div's intention to cross the river.

## **CONDUCT**

27. **The First Attempt.** Plans were made for dusk crossing on 12 Oct 1967, some 300 meters left of the Asaba-Onitsha Bridge. One battalion was tasked to secure a foothold using ferries and assault boats. Several battalions were earmarked as follow up forces. The crossing went on quite well as the battalion secured a foothold and dug-in until the troops were asked to expand the foothold to a bridgehead. As it was still daylight, troops movement could hardly be concealed from view. Unknown to the Federal troops, Biafran troops were dug-in at vantage positions on the high ground where the present Army Barrack is located at Onitsha. The Biafrans expectedly opened fire and hell was let loose when the Federal troops came into killing range. Surprise was achieved and pandemonium ensued resulting in the Federal Troops fleeing in disarray. In the confusion, the troops had to fight with their backs against the river line. Casualty was very high and a good number of soldiers got drowned in the process. It was a very sad experience and by the time the troops reassembled, morale was at very low ebb. The initial success of the crossing tended to have vindicated Col Murtala's decision to carry out a bounce crossing. However, subsequent events showed that the troops were neither sufficiently disciplined nor psychologically ready enough for such a serious task. Indeed events revealed later that one of the acts that gave away the Federal troops was the wanton act of looting and indiscriminate firing as soon as they entered Onitsha

market. Besides, instead of an immediate follow-up, the Federal troops tended to believe (wrongly) that Onitsha had been deserted. Expectedly therefore, the first crossing was an unqualified failure for the following reason:

- a. Lack of discipline. Troops resorted to looting instead of concentrating on securing a foothold and expanding it to a bridgehead.
- b. Inadequate preparations.
- c. Poor tactics and failure to have an eye for the ground.
- d. Non-adherence to the basic principles of war.
- e. No attempt to carry out a feint crossing as a deceptive measure.

From the above, it must be obvious why AHQ may not have been favourably disposed to river crossing at the time. Indeed AHQ fears were vindicated.

28. **The Second Attempt.** In spite of the great losses and the monumental failure of the first attempt, the 2 Inf Div embarked on a second crossing 8 days later. By now the battalions were depleted, morale low and it was obvious that the officers and soldiers had lost faith in themselves and their commander. As a prelude to the second crossing, massive air raids were carried out on Onitsha for almost one week. Unfortunately no serious attempt was made to change the crossing point or carry out a feint crossing. While the Biafrans saw such raids as punitive, the Federal troops considered them necessary to soften the enemy before the actual assault crossing. Spirited attempts were made to raise the obviously low moral of the troops, before the actual crossing. However, most of the soldiers and officers had faith about the success of this attempt. Again at dawn on Oct 1967, Federal

troops in ferries and boats attempted another crossing. By now the Biafrans were aware of every move by the Federal troops and expectedly waited patiently for the boats to get within killing range. After about 2 hour of heavy firing, a good number of the boats sank and only 4 managed to return to safety at the home bank at Asaba. A large number of troops were drowned while a few swam to safety. Again, this was an unmitigated disaster as the crossing was not sufficiently planned and it is even doubtful if resources available were adequate to carry out a crossing at division level. Besides, it is feared that the combat supplies as well as combat service support available were grossly inadequate or simply unavailable.

29. **The Third Attempt.** If the second attempt was uncalled for, the third attempt to cross river Niger was not only foolhardy but also an invitation to annihilation its mere contemplation drew widespread condemnation among the troops. The attempt almost resulted in mutiny as the planning and chaos, confusion, indifference and confrontation characterized preparations. In fact, Lt Col Akinrinade who led the third crossing had open disagreement with his GOC. After much bickering, a third attempt was carried out which predictably ended in another disaster.

### **LESSONS FROM THE FAILED CROSSING**

30. The failed attempts at crossing the river Niger at Asaba brought out the following lessons:

- a. The need for thorough reconnaissance and planning for a river crossing operations.
- b. The need for a thorough understanding of the mechanics of

river crossing operations.

- c. The need for extensive engineer input into the planning of river crossing operations.
- d. The requirement for effective and sustainable fire support.
- e. The need for cooperation to ensure that support at all level is made available for the crossing.
- f. The need for discipline at all levels especially when there is the possibility of getting into urban areas containing attractive goods or machinery.
- g. The need for strict adherence to the principles of war.
- h. The need for commanders to see their actions as complimentary rather than competitive in trying to achieve the higher commander's intentions.
- i. The need to ensure an effective foothold and subsequent bridgehead before the breakout in a river crossing operation.
- j. The need for deceptive measures in order to achieve surprise. Afeint crossing and even landing would have made the difference.
- k. The need for discipline even among senior commanders.
- l. The need for detailed planning for the crossing of a major obstacle.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE FAILED ATTEMPTS TO CROSS THE RIVER NIGER AT ASABA**

31. River Crossing is not a separate phase of war but part of the advance or attack. It is regarded as the crossing of an obstacle. Simple as this may appear, river crossing whether bounce or deliberate requires various levels of

operational and tactical inputs that would ensure success.

32. The 2 In f Div advance through the Mid-west was rapid and the GOC then thought it fit to maintain the momentum. Arguably, this perception must be viewed against the need to end the war quickly and the silent competition among the field commanders in their attempts to out-shine one another. However, the decision to attempt a bounce crossing was quite sound. Nevertheless, such a decision became highly questionable given that it lacked AHQ support and even approval. It is possible that AHQ's tacit disapproval may have deprived 2 In f Div of the required air and logistics support required for a successful operation of such magnitude.

33. Again most of the field commanders were young and inexperienced. It is therefore possible that a good number could have adequately comprehended the far-reaching implications of their actions and decisions. While consultations may have been carried out, it is possible that in the quest to maintain the momentum, wise counsel was largely ignored. Circumstantially therefore, errors of judgement may have occurred at various levels of command resulting in the failed attempts.

34. The Mechanics of the river crossing may also have had some flaws. Eyewitness accounts reveal that the Asaba-Onitsha Bridge was intact before the first attempt. In fact, Engineer personnel got on the bridge, which was blocked at the entrance by a scraper. The Bridge had been prepared for demolition. It is inexplicable why efforts were not made immediately to cut the detonation cord and electric cables so that the Bridge could have been captured intact. Without prejudice to semantics it may be concluded that

thorough reconnaissance and planning were not carried out before the conduct of this river crossing. This had a debilitating effect on the subsequent execution of the river crossing.

35. Again, there is no evidence to show that there was a feint-crossing attempt. The teaching is to have a feint crossing to distract the enemy's attention from the main crossing point. In addition, the crossing in any case was too close to the bridge. Against a more lethal enemy, the forces amassed for the operation would have been decimated by artillery fire at the assembly area, even before any attempt was made to cross.

36. Even after realizing the errors made in the first attempt, no deliberate effort was made to correct them in subsequent crossings. In addition, very little effort was made to adhere to the principles of war or even make a radical change of the crossing point. These and other points make the attempts to cross the River Niger a classical case of a plan put together in a hurry and executed with little regard to the basic rules of tactics. The obvious consequence was a well-deserved dismal failure.

37. The 3 failed attempts at crossing the River Niger at Onitsha informed the need to have wider consultation on further operations. In the end, it was decided to carry out a rearward movement through Agbor, Uromi, Auchi and Idah in order to head for Onitsha. Although requiring a huge logistics outlay, it represented a more acceptable option as the river Niger would now be crossed unopposed and in own territory. The crossing was carried out without any hitch.

38. The long advance to Onitsha began using 7, 8 and 9 Brigades. Udi

and Awka were easily captured en-route. By end of March 1968, 2 Inf Div arrived at Abagana for preparatory action to capture Onitsha. The convoy consisted of troops carrying vehicles, armoured cars and fuel tankers all numbering over one hundred. As the convoy approached the Biafran positions at Ifite-Ukpo, a mortar shell accidentally landed on a fuel tanker. The resulting fire affected several vehicles in the convoy. The Biafrans made a quick move to exploit this advantage by attacking the front and rear of the convoy. Most of the combat supplies including ammo. POL and other materials were destroyed. It was a chance card for the Biafrans but a major set back for the Federal troops. This incident became known as the Abagana Disaster. Much of a disaster as it was, it did not deter 2 In f Div's efforts to capture Onitsha.

### **THE CAPTURE OF ONITSHA**

39. The failed attempts at crossing the River Niger to Onitsha reinforced the need to thoroughly shell the town before further operations could be carried out. Even then, as events unfolded, it became clear that it was a matter of time before the famous commercial nerve centre of the East would fall. In spite of the elaborate and rather cautious preparations by the Federal troops, the fall of Onitsha was regarded as an anti-climax as Federal troops virtually strolled into a deserted and half ruined city early April, 1968. Thus, ended the illusion of attempting to capture Onitsha, an effort that took a great toll on the resources of the Federal troops. The irony of it all was that capturing Onitsha by going through Idah, Nsukka and Abagana had been suggested 6 months earlier but rejected by the then GOC.

**FIGURE 8: THE CROSSING OF THE RIVER NIGER AT IDAH AND THE ABAGANA DISASTER**



**NOTE:** Most of the illustrations are not legible and easily comprehensible.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SOUTHERN OPERATION

#### PREAMBLE

1. The blockage of the Southern Atlantic Coast to prevent the Biafrans from getting the much needed supplies to sustain the war effort and to secure Nigerian oil installations and shipping activities was one of the strategies of the Federal Government. However, this blockage would have been insufficient to secure the area and the economic lifeline of the country. It was therefore necessary for the Federal troops to physically dominate the mainland area to the South particularly the strategic cities of Port-Harcourt, Calabar and indeed the entire Southern coastal belt stretching to the Delta areas of the Midwest.

#### BONNY LANDING

##### GENERAL

2. Geographically speaking, Bonny is the most strategic of the Southern towns in the coastal belts not only because of its access to Port-Harcourt, but also because of the numerous rivers and creeks that straddle the area. It would be necessary for the Federal Troops to dominate the Bonny Area if the Biafrans were not to take them over completely and make life difficult. The heavy presence of oil installations around the area vis-à-vis Oron and Calabar also makes Bonny the most attractive first staging post for troops landing and commencement of battle in the Southern Sector.

## **PREPARATION**

3. The decision to land troops at Bonny was kept secret. Very few officers knew what the actual plan was. A deliberate deception plan was propagated to the effect that the troops were going to land in the riverine areas of the Midwest, as part of the overall plan to capture the oil producing areas. However, the fact that the Midwest had declared its resolve not to allow its territory to be used as battle ground, coupled with the very complex nature of sea borne operation, probably made the Biafrans to assume that the Federal Troops would not be capable of undertaking such a landing operation.

## **PLAN**

4. Since the entire operation is going to be sea borne, the Navy had the task of strategic movement of troops and materials to the assault area (Bonny), using the fire power available to it to prepare the ground for landing without compromising the peace and security of the people the Federal Forces sought to liberate. The Southern Operation was led by Col Adekunle who at the beginning of the war was the Commander of the Lagos Garrison Organisation (LGO). The LGO was a brigade strength formation consisting of 6,7 and 8 Battalions. The three battalions were committed to the Southern operations.

5. Essentially by then, the plan was to effect a beach landing in quick movements, dominate the outlying areas as a firm base to operate in the riverine areas.

## **THE NAVY**

6. The Navy was tasked to dominate the entire Continental Shelf to ensure the effectiveness of the sea blockage already imposed on Biafra by the Federal Government. Lastly it was to ensure adequate command, control and coordination of the movement from Bonny to Lagos. Accordingly, the Naval Commander for the operation Capt Nelson Soroh (NN) was made the overall commander of the operation up to the time the troops landed and occupied the Bonny Island. Soroh was assisted by Commander Adelanwa. In all, eleven ships were made available for the operation made up of NNS NIGERIA an all purpose frigate, one gun boat NNS OGOJA, four sea ward defence boats namely NNS KADUNA, SAPELE, BENIN and BONNY. One survey boat, NNS PENELOPE, the landing craft NNS LOKOJA and two merchant ships HERBERT MACAULAY and BODE THOMAS.

## **CONDUCT**

7. On 26 July, the LGO with 6 Bn leading carried out a successful beach landing in Bonny. The operation turned out to be a fierce, bloody sea and land battle. The Navy gave all the necessary support and 6, 7 and 8 Bns were able to exploit forward of their bridgeheads clearing Bonny completely of Biafran forces. It was about this time that the Midwest was invaded. 7 Bn was therefore left at Bonny while 6 and 8 were withdrawn to Escravos. The moves were carried out with the support of the Navy and the National Shipping Line.

8. The capture of Bonny and its oil installation highlighted the tempo of oil policies during the Civil War. The Shell BP manager was arrested and

detained by Ojukwu who wanted to seize the royalties for Biafra. The Company later claimed that they did not do anything for the Biafrans.

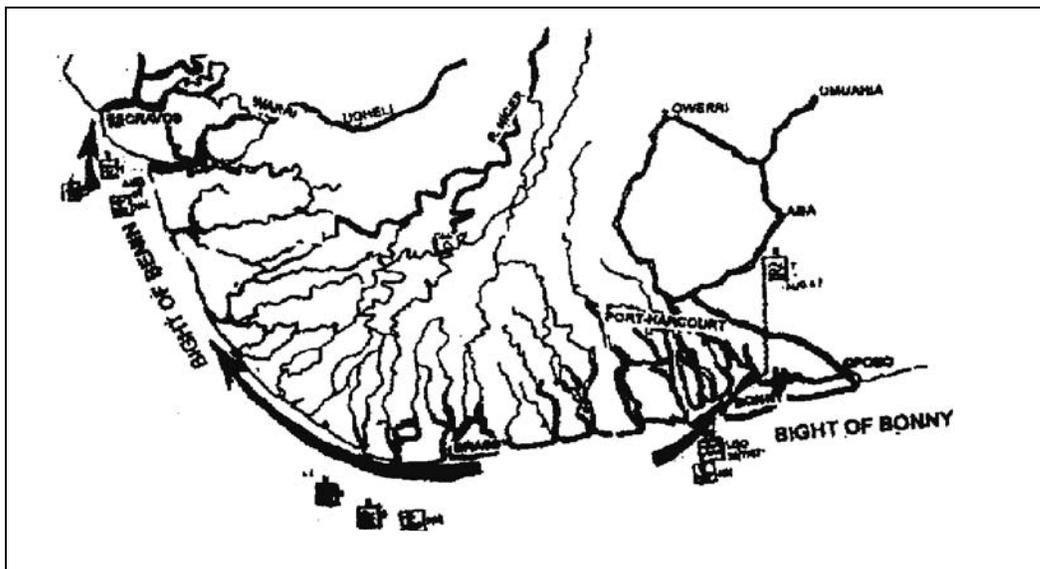
9 At Bonny, Adekunle the commander of 3 MCDO got his men together and prepared for OP TIGER CLAW; the plan to capture Opobo and Calabar against the Biafran Bn under Capt Orji holding Calabar and Oron beaches, there were 6 battalions of about 500 men each of 3 MCDO. The Nigerian Navy was also in support. Most of the Nigerian troops were untrained in battle except 8 and 33 Bns that had some fighting experience. The 4 bns were 34, 35, 36 and 37. Using envelopment tactics, Adekunle landed with 33 Bn and advanced with additional 3 battalions from the southernmost quarters of Calabar, to mop up Biafrans trapped in the town and drive them against 8 Bn. 3 MCDO was to continue to use this tactics successfully in subsequent operations. Calabar fell on 18 October 1967 in the face of overwhelming fire power.

10. After the capture of Calabar, Adekunle's division took on Uyo, Anang and Aba provinces. It was the intention to use the whole of Adekunle's Div for the operation. The thrust was to be made in the direction of Ikot Ekpene and Port-Harcourt. One of Adekunle's Bdes, 12 Bde under Maj Aliyu took Obubra in March 1968.

11. By the third week of April 1968, the drive to Port-Harcourt had begun. The plan was to advance on 3 fronts; to the North along Imo River, centrally through Bori and in the West from Ika Water-side and Bodo West. 17 Brigade captured Afam, giving the Federal troops the control of the power station. 14 Bde under Lt Col Eromobor advanced up to

Bori, 14,15,16 and 19 Bde entered Elele. These successes and progress of the Federal troops caused unrest in Port-Harcourt. On entering Port-Harcourt, the Federal troops found dispirited and disorganized Biafrans. The capture of Port-Harcourt was a big boost to the prestige and reputation of Adekunle's Div as it implied a complete ring around the rebel enclave. Thus, began the slow but irreversible constriction of the remains of what used to be a big 'Biafran Nation'.

**FIGURE 9: THE BONNY LANDING**



**THE CAPTURE OF OWERRI, ABA AND UMUAHIA  
(OPERATION OAU)**

**GENERAL**

12. Having liberated most parts of Rivers state, the stage was now set for a series of misadventure which the 3 Marine Commando operations faced in the Igbo heartland until Adekunle was relieved of his command on 16 May 1969. The month of August 1968 saw a lull in all the divisions and September marked the beginning of 3 Marine Commando's disasters. The euphoria of the capture of Aba and Owerri made Adekunle to assume that he could achieve a similar feat in the case of Umuahia, the new administrative capital of Biafra. Against the advice of Army Headquarters, Adekunle decided to take Umuahia so as to give Gowon 'OAU' (Owerri, Aba and Umuahia) on Oct 1, 1968 as anniversary present.

13. Ojukwu, it was thought would defend Umuahia to the last man. Adekunle's attack went ahead without the Commandos securing their communication line. They were consequently cut off from the rear when they were a few kilometers from Umuahia. By 7 October, 6 days after the 1 October anniversary, the Commando had lost virtually all its troops and weapons.

14. By November, the Biafrans had strengthened themselves to dislodge the Commados from Owerri and Aba. The Commandos had also become demoralized and the Commander was becoming increasingly jittery as a result of the series of losses. He had worked himself to the point of getting over-burdened with even the signing of soldiers' passes. The weariness of

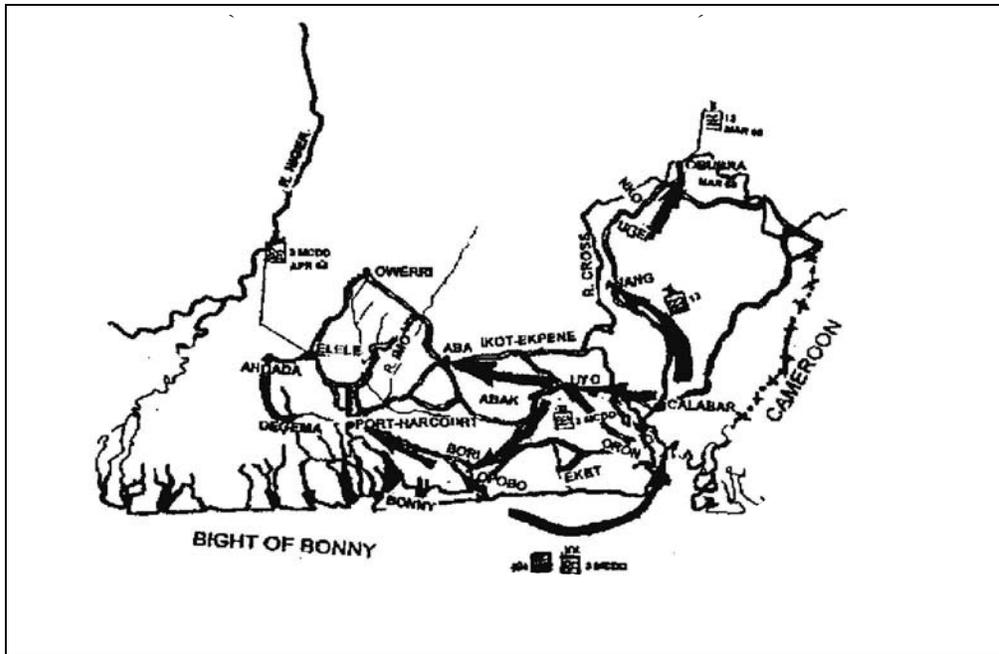
having to do everything by himself had begun to take its toll on the Black Scorpion.

15. Taking advantage of this situation, the Biafrans cut off the 16 Commando Brigade in Owerri. Like Umuahia communication lines were unprotected. This was because whereas 3 and 4 Brigades were supposed to converge at Owerri to take and to man the routes, only 16 Brigade arrived. The original plan was for the advance into Owerri to proceed on 3 axes. On the right was 12 Commando Brigade that was to go through to Aba. 16 Commando Brigade was to go from Port-Harcourt to Elele and into Owerri; and 14 and 15 Brigades to go through the left of Oguta, pass through the left of Owerri to cut off Onitsha axis so as to prevent Biafran infiltration and finally join 16 Brigade at Owerri. Unfortunately, only 16 Brigade made it. The remaining Commando brigades linked up Aba area and Oguta but left the centre leading to Owerri open to the Biafrans.

16. 16 Brigade fought gallantly to protect itself for months. The 3 Marine Commando Headquarters was meanwhile helpless with a weary commander and a dejected body of men. As the situation got critical the Biafrans also tried to stop the supplies by air when they began to fire at the supply aircrafts. The supplies ceased. The Brigade however managed to withdraw in an organized fashion after sustaining heavy casualties.

17. By early March 1969, it became obvious that a change of command was necessary to reinvigorate the 3 MCDO. The Div had suffered many reverses, morale was low and it was obvious that Col Adekunle was at his wits end to find a formula to rekindle the spirit of the officers and soldiers.

**FIGURE 10: THE OPOBO AXIS AND THE CAPTURE OF CALABAR (OPERATION TIGER CLAW)**



Arguably, the techniques and style that worked so well a few months earlier had become stale with series of setbacks. On May 16, 1969, Col Olusegun Obasanjo took over the Division from the Black Scorpion and moved immediately to restore the confidence of the troops, raise their morale and motivate them to thresholds of success. In a very short while he achieved most of his aims.

**THE SECOND ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE OWERRI**

18. **Plan.** Adekunle's Division was reorganized into sectors for the simultaneous capture of Owerri, Aba and Umuahia for the second time. The following tasks were to be accomplished:

- a. 15 and 16 Bdes to capture Owerri.

- b. 12 and 17 Bdes to capture Aba.
  - c. 13 and 18 Bdes to capture Umuahia.
19. **Conduct.** The advance to Aba was led by 105 Bn of 17 Bde while 33 Bn of 16 Bde led the advance to Owerri. The advance commenced simultaneously. It was on a wide front stretching from River Niger to Cross River. This invariably led to the extension of the Federal troops line of communication. The Brigade made a bold dash to Oguta on the river, landing on the northern side of Oguta on 10 September 1968. This action caused panic in the rebel Camp as it threatened Uli-Ihiala air-strip. However Oguta could not be secured and the Federal troops had to withdraw from there on 15 September 1968 to avoid being encircled. On 16 September, a day later 16 Brigade entered and captured Owerri. The commercial town of Aba had earlier on 4 September 1968 fallen to 17 Bde. Rudolf Steiner had two poorly equipped battalions. Taffy Williams, whose battalion was in complete indifference to the whole exercise, could not withstand the Federal offensive. As a result of the confusion in the Biafran military camp, the Federal troops had an easy win with their adequate supply of support weapons and materials. Owerri later was lost to the Biafran forces and was recaptured only on 9<sup>th</sup> Jan, 1970, a few days to the Biafran surrender.
20. **Lesson.** The following lessons were brought out in OP OAU:
- a. The need for thorough planning.
  - b. The effect of poor coordination on the outcome of battles.
  - c. The effect of the protection of communication and re-supply lines.

- d. The effect of poor logistics back up on the performance of field troops.

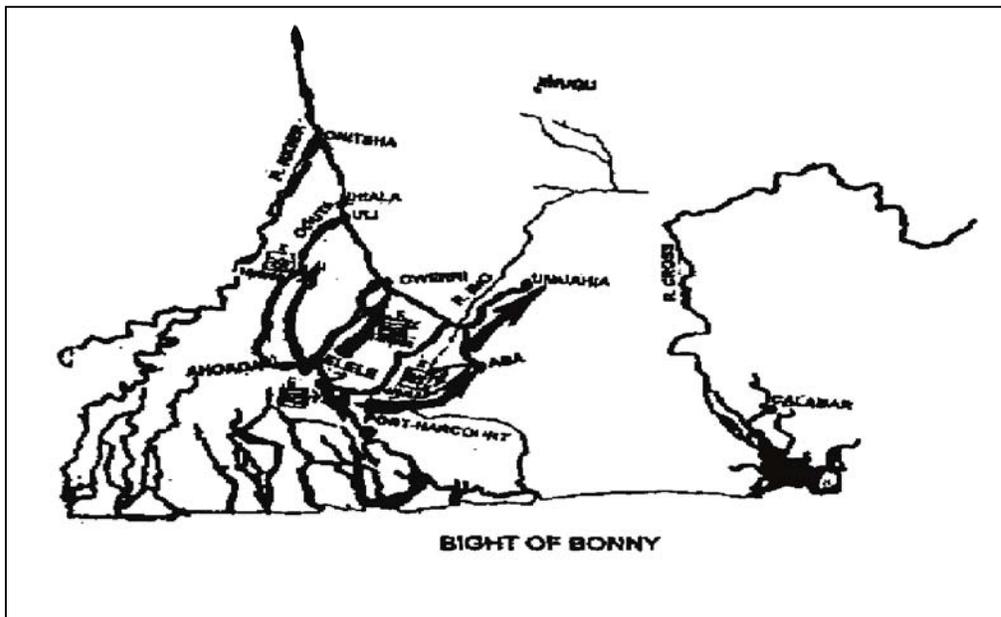
**THE FINAL COLLAPSE OF THE BIAFRAN FORCES**

21.

*The end of the war came like a flash of tropical lighting momentarily illuminating a half remembered landscape and re-imposing itself on the consciousness of a world which had already pigeonholed the conflict...as insoluble. It took everyone by surprise... the initial reaction was one of disbelief.*

John de St. Jorre (1980)

**FIGURE 11: OPERATION OAU THE CAPTURE OF OWERRI, ABA AND UMUAHIA**



22. There had been different opinions in Britain by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and an important member of the International Observer team on the tactics that the Federal troops should adopt to defeat the rebel forces. It was felt that the capture of Uli airstrip would end the war as this was the only link Biafra had with the outside world. The BBC's opinion was that the use of the deadly artillery guns would quickly spell the end of the war by instant defeat of the Biafran forces.

23. The Biafran Army therefore took steps to forestall any of these plans by the Federal forces. The first major offensive culminating in the final collapse of rebel forces was the attack on Awlaw. It was a brigade strength offensive supported by armour, artillery mortar and air support. The Biafran 53 Brigade of 15 Div in Awlaw was captured but in a spirited counter attack, the Biafran forces regained it. The recapture cost to the Biafran troops was high. All resources of the Army were committed to the counter attack.

24. With the resources of the Biafran Army seriously depleted, it could not sustain decisive assault on the Federal troops. After the fall of Umuahia, the seat of the Biafran Government, all the administrative directorates moved across the Imo River while 12 Division of the Biafran force dashed to Aba to save the situation. The Division was nothing to write home about as regards its operational state. It was acutely short of manpower and there was no existing administrative support for the division. From Sep - Dec 1969 it was now depending on only 50 gal of POL per day, while the men had to live off the ground. Worse of all, the division became a haven for spiritualists who were exploiting the absence of material support to

prosecute a war based on the belief in prayers as the only possible way out. Divine intervention, indeed.

25. Capitalizing on this state of the Biafran Division the Federal forces attacked in full strength, with air support. This led to the capture of Aba township and Ogor Hill along Abakaliki-Umuahia road. The link up by Federal forces in Aba and Ikot-Ekpene with Umuahia isolated the Biafran's Special Forces at Arochukwu. Within 48 hours the unit ran out of all supplies. The collapse of Biafran's Commando Division at Umuahia exposed the rear of the Biafran's 15 Div in Okigwe sector, giving the Federal forces control of all areas east of the Imo River as far as to the north of Umuahia.

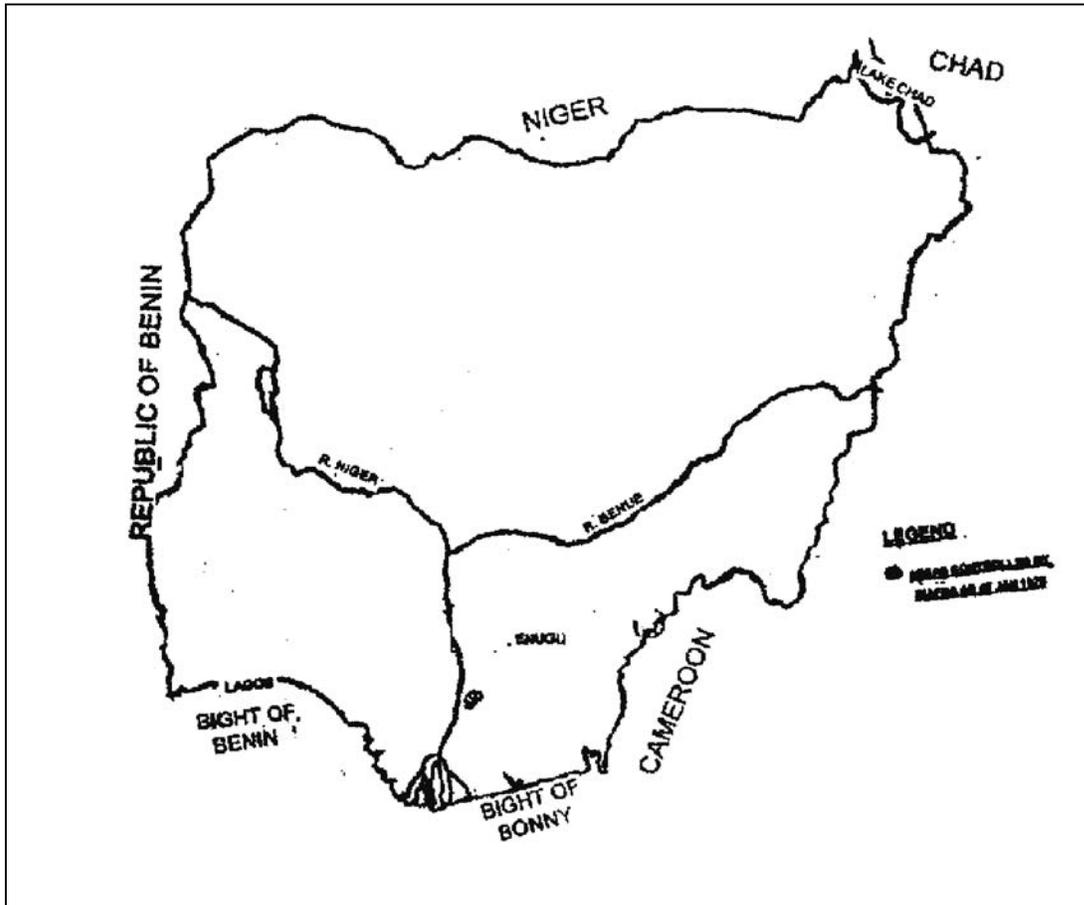
26. On 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1970, with massive air and ground support the Federal troops attacked the Biafrans 63 Bde at Amala. Securing Amala, Owerri and Mbaise were the next target. On entering Owerri by 9<sup>th</sup> Jan, there was no semblance of Biafran Government, the town having been evacuated. By 10<sup>th</sup> Jan, Federal troops were already pushing out in every direction from Owerri. Amaraku on the Okigwe road fell and the Federal troops were only 7 km away from the Biafran Army Tactical Headquarters at Zisu. On Jan 11, having sensed that the situation was hopeless, Ojukwu with a handful of his officials took-off on a supposedly "*peace mission*" from Uli airstrip, leaving the army under charge of General Effiong who surrendered to the Federal Authority. Thus, ended the hopes and aspirations of the Easterners who momentarily saw in Biafra the realization of a dream outside the Nigerian context. The end of the war also marked the beginning of the tortuous task of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, which formed the basis

of Gowon's post-war policies.

27. The wounds of war may not have been healed after almost 36 years. All the same, Nigeria has managed to trudge along as one country in diversity but having one aspiration to remain a truly united country free from discrimination, ethnicity, tribalism, nepotism, favouritism and religious bigotry; issues that caused the Civil War in the first place,

28. Events in the last 10 years show that a lot of integration, reconciliation and balancing are still required to give every Nigerian a true sense of belonging, and to deflect that indeed the efforts put into the Civil War by both sides were all worth the while.

**FIGURE 12: POLITICAL MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING AREAS CONTROLLED BY THE BIAFRANS AT THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR**



## CHAPTER SIX

### SHORT NOTES

#### PREAMBLE

1. This section has attempted to cover most areas that are normally treated as short notes in the examination. It consists of those aspects of the conflict that are either not operations in themselves or are common to all the Services.
2. Aspects of the War such as air operations, marine operations, the role of psychological operations, etc have been briefly discussed in this section.

#### AIR OPERATIONS

3. **Air Borne Operation.** At the beginning of the War the Nigerian Airforce (NAF) was only 3 years old. It was therefore under great pressure to meet the requirements of the Army that was an older and more established service. Mig Fighters were subsequently acquired from Russia. However, the Russians declined to fly the planes for Nigeria and also barred any Western pilots from doing so. Nigeria had to seek for Egyptian pilots as a way out. Converted BC 3s were used on bombing raids by Western pilots recruited by John Peters who had won the contract to recruit pilots for the Federal Government. However, the Nigerian crews were used only on the converted bombers.
4. **Rebel Air Power.** On the Biafran side there was a lot of ingenuity resulting in the establishment of an effective Airforce which became a major

source of worry for the Federal forces. At the start of the War, the Biafran pilots and technicians who returned to the East had no planes to fly. Two old planes; a B25 and B26 were acquired along with 3 helicopters. The 2 planes were fitted with machine guns and locally made bombs. The Biafrans using the bombs wreaked havoc in Lagos and some parts of the North at the initial stages of the War. The Biafran Airforce was however silenced when the Egyptian-flown Russian Mig Jets appeared on the scene.

5. The Biafran Airforce was briefly on the scene towards the end of 1969. Count Von Rosen organized the minicon aircrafts which were successfully used at the Owerri Sector for inflicting casualties on the Federal forces. The Biafran Air power could be summarized as follows:

- a. Limited surprise attacks from the Air by a squadron of tiny propeller driven trainer planes equipped with rockets.
- b. Biafra had no operational Air Force since the ineffective attempts to bomb Lagos with a World War II B26 which was shot down.
- c. By Dec 1968, Ojukwu contacted Count Von Rosen for possible revitalization of the rebel Air force.
- d. As a result of the contact with Von Rosen, Ojukwu sent his approval for the purchase of five milicom aircrafts from Sweden. They were unarmed MF1 B training aircrafts purchased through Tanzanian.
- e. French made Matra rockets and carriage twelve per plane, were purchased in France with actual fittings done in Gabon.
- f. Von Rosen then became rebel Air Force Commander with 2 other Swedish Pilots, 2 Biafran Pilots, a Swedish mechanic and a

Swedish instructor.

g. The first sortie by Von Rosen was on May 22, 1969; he attacked Port-Harcourt, Benin and Enugu and later attacked Nigerian Air Station at Ughelli.

### **ULI AIRSTRIP**

6. Uli Airstrip was Biafra's life line through the War. It was its only link with the outside world through which vital supplies were brought in. After the fall of Biafra's proper airport at Port Harcourt in May 1968, the effort of the Federal pilots directed at closing Uli Airstrip.

7. Uli was the best protected Biafran Airstrip. It was an important psychological symbol of resistance and hope for the Biafrans. It was therefore as vital for the Nigerians to capture it, as it was for the Biafrans to keep it open.

8. In Oct 1968, the Federal troops were nearly within shelling range of the Uli Airstrip after they had briefly occupied Oguta, some 10 miles from the Airstrip. But the Biafrans succeeded in recapturing Oguta. The Russian field guns acquired by the Federal Government were never close enough to engage Uli.

9. The only other course open to the federal Forces to capture Uli airstrip was by air. The following reasons made it impossible for this to be achieved throughout the war:

a. Uli was so properly camouflaged from the air that it was very difficult to locate.

- b. It was seldom used during the day and an attack on it during that period could only lead to making holes on the runway which the Biafrans would easily cover up.
- c. Only non-Nigerian pilots working for the Federal Government could undertake a night bombing assignment. Since the mercenary pilots knew that the closure of Uli Airstrip would mean the automatic end of the War, they did not want it to happen for them to be in employment and earn their wages.
- d. Uli airstrip was being used by various International relief agencies. Knocking it off by the Federal Troops could mean destroying such agencies air craft and supplies. This may lead to a bad reputation for the federal Government in the eyes of the International Community.
- e. The foreign pilots on the Nigerian side were not too willing to kill mercenaries on the Biafran side.
- f. Finally, an end to the civil war by the closure of Uli Airstrip would mean stopping the lucrative trade of the Western Powers in supply of war materials to both sides.

### **MARINE OPERATIONS**

10. The attempted crossing over the Niger by the Federal Forces for the capture of Onitsha was the major opposed river crossing operations during the Civil War. Apart from this major crossing exercise, the entire Southern Sector operations under the command of Col Benjamin Adekunle were essentially sea landing operations. The operations were carefully coordinated with the Nigerian Navy. The Lagos Garrison Organization

(LGO) successfully landed in Bonny on 26 July 1967 after a bloody sea battle and later cleared the Biafrans from Bonny. After the fall of Bonny, using the ships of the Nigerian Navy and Nigerian National Shipping Line (NNSL) 2 battalions of the 3 Marine Commando Division stormed Calabar in the Navy ship under the command of Capt Soroh (NN). The NNS Lokoja beached the men of 8 Battalion on Calabar on 18 October 1967. Naval Gunfire provided the necessary fire support for the landing. Calabar was captured on the same day.

11. The capture of Oron was also a joint effort of the Navy and the Air Force. This landing at Oron which was with fire support of the Navy and Air Force met with much resistance from the rebel troops. This landing had to be diverted to the Allen Saw Mills from where troops of the 33 Battalion dispersed through the town to gain complete control of it.

### **SOCIO-ECONOMIC UNDERTONES TO THE SUCCESSION OF EASTERN NIGERIA**

12. Although many of the events that led to the Civil War were economic, many raised vital political issues. For example, the mass exodus of the Igbos from the Northern Nigeria was political but resulted in severe economic hardship for many. Most of returnees were government workers while some were high class businessmen. Good number of them lost everything and there was little hope of any compensation. Expectedly, such aggrieved persons were ready and willing to join the call for a sovereign state where the safety of their lives would be guaranteed.

13. A very significant economic undertone to the succession bid was the

promulgation of an edict appropriating all Federal revenues in the then Eastern Nigeria. Three other “*Survival Edicts*” followed. They were intended to take over the Federal Corporations, Railways, Rolling-Stocks, Institutions and Courts. Only the important oil revenues normally paid in Lagos and London were left untouched for the time being.

14. The Federal Government quickly reacted to Ojukwu’s so called survival edicts and imposed an economic blockade on Eastern Nigeria which of course was imminent and expected. The high jacking of Nigeria Airways Fokker Friendship aircraft in Benin by Eastern Nigeria was a major economic consideration in the Nigerian Civil War. This was further aggravated by Ojukwu’s intensified propaganda against the Federal Government, especially his sentimental speeches to Reuters News Agency. The momentum for secession increased and remained largely unchecked.

15. The Federal Cabinet was united on the Decision to impose economic sanctions on the East, but it was divided on the use of force to combat secession. The West in particular, was still sore about the presence of Northern troops, and Awolowo was alleged to have said, “The maintenance of the Federation is not worth one drop of blood”. This type of open declaration gave some impetus to the Eastern Region who now felt that Nigeria would not take up arms no matter what happened.

16. This type of misconception of the Eastern leadership made Ojukwu to tell the Eastern Consultative Assembly that “there was no power in this country or in Black Africa that can subdue us by force”. At that Assembly, Ojukwu was mandated unanimously on 30 May, 1967, to declare the

Sovereign Republic of Biafra at an early practicable date. Ojukwu said that he had already sent ‘a final letter’ to Gowon telling him that he had “no alternative but to make plans for a separate existence in the interests of self preservation”. Observers saw this as not actually amounting to secession, but a clear indication that East had gone past the point of no return.

### **THE ECONOMIC IMPLICATION OF THE CIVIL WAR**

17. One special feature of war, whether it is a civil strife or an international conflict is its impact on the nation’s economy. During the period between 1968 and 70, fighting the war went on pari-passu with the state of the Nigerian Economy. On the part of Nigeria, the economic “Win the War” led to the early collapse of Biafra. The oil revenue, exclusively controlled by the federal Government gave ensured economic and consequently the decisive military advantage over Biafra. The Federal Government at the onset was better off as it controlled the oil producing areas of the then Rivers State and the South Eastern States. As a strategy to win the War, The Federal Government identified vital, economic targets at the commencement of the war and went ahead to capture them. The early capture of bonny area and Calabar was a calculated design to weaken the Biafrans economically. The Biafrans could not import crude oil. All they could do was to set up local refineries which did not affect the Nigerian oil Industry adversely during the Civil War.

18. However, by the middle of 1969, there was partial disruption of oil production when Von Rosen caused some devastation of the oil areas through air raids. The danger of the Biafrans air raids was quickly checked

by the Nigerian Air Force, thus forestalling the huge economic problem that would have confronted the Federal Government. During this period, the federal Government took effective economic measures by controlling and limiting import licence, bank loans and deposits. Other economic measures were high import and excise duties and imposition of special war taxes.

19. The economic blockade imposed on Biafra by the Federal Government resulted in a long struggle for economic survival. The Basic necessities of life in Biafra were simply food and arms. An emergency food production programme was launched in January 1969. The impact was quite useful and important to the Biafrans throughout the war period. Although the food production could not sustain the Biafran community, it served as a supplement to the much needed protein food flown in by relief agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. Biafran's primary objective was to maintain her political and economic sovereignty while Nigeria's was to deny her that sovereignty. The economic blockade was therefore used as a weapon against Biafra. The Eastern part of Nigeria before the war broke out was densely populated and had to rely on imported food especially those with high protein contents. At the end of 1969, the situation had reached crisis proportion and so churches and other charitable organizations in Biafra did not hesitate to appeal for help. Serious food shortages resulted in high incidences of nutritional diseases such as kwashiorkor and marasmus. Both diseases caused a high rate of mortality of both infants and adults.

20. Unlike the federal Government, Biafra lacked the much needed foreign exchange abroad to buy arms and maintain a good number of Biafra's missions. The situation was therefore such that could not be averted

as long as the war lasted. Money realised from appeal launches, Biafran sympathizer's home and abroad, sale of stamps, private donations etc could not provide all relief materials required by the populace.

21. The greatest economic measure against Biafra was the Minister of Finance's (Chief Obafemi Awolowo) decision to change the Nigerian Currency. This decision, which took the Biafrans by surprise, resulted in all the currency holdings in the rebel enclave or in their possession becoming void and thus ceased to be legal tender. The new currency was not convertible. The rebels purchasing power was gone overnight. Consequently, Biafra sent some emissaries to different European countries with cap in hand to seek for monetary aid. Most of the money realised ended in the emissaries' pockets and only small fraction got to the officers of Biafra. This should obviously be viewed as an economic sabotage which reduced greatly any hope of survival for the Republic of Biafra. Arguably this remains the main reason why Biafra's defeat came too soon. Meanwhile the Federal troops were pressing from all fronts recording victories and occupying the major rebel controlled areas. The collapse of the Republic was imminent as the economic blockade continued. The Biafrans were fighting without the basic necessities required food and arms. Their defeat was therefore just a question of time.

### **THE ROLE AND APPLICATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR**

22. Biafra's strategy for internationalizing the Civil War was the use of psychological warfare as a vital weapon of war. Different writers have described this. Arthur Nwankwo describes Biafra's propaganda as one of the

most efficient and powerful machines in history. The Eastern Region established many directorates among which the propaganda directorate which was regarded as first among equals. The Directorate was staffed with a lot of experienced mass media executives, seasoned psycho and political analysts. There were three departments within the Directorate, External Public Bureau, Home Press Services and Research and Publication Departments. Special committee also existed in the directorate each assigned to a specific audience. The intention of the Biafran Army was to the war until the world's conscience could be sufficiently aroused against genocide. By this they meant foreign intervention to bring about a cease-fire and political settlement which would guarantee the integrity and self-determination of the land of the 'rising sun'.

23. There were the Calling Africans East of Biafra Committee and also Calling of Nigeria Committee. Each committee had a Chairman charged with the responsibility of the preparation of up to date scripts and there by maintaining an effective library of developments concerning their audience. They were to prepare powerful propaganda materials about the war to be aired through the Voice of Biafra and to conduct researches in war propaganda generally. The Kaduna and Enugu radios were constantly engaged in a lethal stream of propaganda. Hassan Katsina, the then Governor of Northern Nigeria boasted that the East could be crushed in a matter of weeks. The Biafran Radio in response became sarcastic, broadcasting the political weather reports in Nigeria; "Lagos fiddling, West breaking the fetters; Mid-West re-assessing; and Eastern Nigeria count down".

24. The secret behind the success of Biafra's psychological operations lies in the coherence and its power of focusing. One issue was taken up at a time. Even though the language of communication changed with the audience, the central theme was always the same. For instance, Ojukwu gave a persuasive presentation of the East's view of Aburi and its disappointing aftermath. He interpreted the struggle as that of the progressive South against the reactionary North. He said further, 'it is not Ibos themselves that they are against; what the North objects to is a government controlled perhaps by the Ibos or an effective government'.

25. Within the propaganda directorate was the Political Analysis Committee. Its duty was to analyze each news item relating to Biafra and to recommend the best line of response to it. In analyzing for example, a news item from the British Broadcasting Corporation, consideration would be given to its motives, and its effects on all aspects of the war. Would it affect the fighting soldiers? In what way would it affect the diplomatic front? Several such questions would have to be asked before a possible rejoinder is recommended. Even then the rejoinders would be weighed on the basis of possible reactions of the different interest groups.

26. Recommendations of the Political Analysis Committee were passed on to the State House where, following a discussion in the Guidance Committee, a decision was reached on what was to be the current theme of propaganda, based on its knowledge of its audience. Each committee produced propaganda materials which were fed to the people through the radio.

27. The External Publicity Bureau (EPB) was responsible for making releases for both the Voice of Biafra and Mark Press-Biafra's Press agent in Geneva. The EPB also published journals, the most important of which were "Biafra Time" and "Biafra News Letter"

28. The Home Press Service (HPS) was responsible for all home publicity. It established provincial headquarters that supplied news of home developments to the central headquarters and distributed government releases, handouts and propaganda tracts to the populace.

29. The Research and Publication Department was a House Research Organ. It was staffed by Political Scientists, Sociologists, Anthropologists and Historians who produced information on the cultural, political and sociological background of issues, and made these available to the Political Analysis Committee.

30. Thus the military struggle in and over the bush and jungles of Eastern Nigeria were accompanied by a bitter war of words: a conflict, it often seemed, pursued with greater energy and imagination than the one on the ground. Its weapons were newspapers, pamphlets, books, photographs, posters, postage stamps and more importantly, the radio and television. The tactics of the psyops of the Civil War was basically propaganda pure and applied to the world press and foreign lobbies.

31. The Psyops had a strategic influence of helping to bring 'outsiders' in and continually highlighted the central dichotomy between "Biafra" and the Federal Government. It should however be understood that domestic propaganda received less publicity but certainly had the greater influence in

shaping the course of the War.

32. The federal Government possessed the means (Government controlled newspapers and radio stations) to propagate their views and mould public opinion. However, it was only after the second coup did they begin to exercise and develop them to their full capacity. The North was noted to have retained enough of its former independence to embarrass Lagos and the Federal Ministry of Information, which was supposed to control the whole country's information media from time to time. For instance Radio Kaduna was said to be the worst offender, peddling a consistently extreme and some time down-right murderous anti-Biafran line, often contradicting Lagos conciliatory tone and reinforcing the Igbos genocidal fears which the Federal government was trying to allay.

33. The 'Radio Enugu' which after the fall of the capital in the fourth month of the War was anywhere but in its rightful place, usually well-hidden in a clump of bamboos deep in the bush was a very great weapon of psychological operation. Psyops was a key actor in preparing the general mood of secession and equally crucial in maintaining an appropriate bellicose tempo of the War especially for Biafra in the later desperate stages.

34. In spite of the Biafrans enviable success in war propaganda, the International support required to sustain the rebel regime was not forthcoming and the rebel leader Odumegwu Ojukwu had no alternative but to change his foreign policy strategy. The proposed strategy was a fresh attempt by the rebel regime to penetrate the international community, thus ensuring Biafra's self reliance. This would be a welcome relief to the Biafra

who had seen realities of economic blockade and deprivation. It would also reduce her total dependence on humanitarian relief, which she had quickly realised would take her no where. Biafra worked miracles in raising the sympathy of international opinion and won external propaganda war. However, they failed to persuade through their effective propaganda the majority of OAU members or any of the super powers (except France), to give necessary military support. On the other hand, the Federal Government received an almost bewildering inventory of weapons from a variety of sources. Nigeria received a large consignment of rifles, bombs and MIG fighters from Soviet Union and got manpower assistance from UAR and East Germany. This great international support received by Nigeria is an important actor that led to the collapse of Biafra.

**ADMIN, MORALE: COMMAND AND CONTROL,  
ORGANIZATION AND PARA-MILITARY SET  
UP IN NIGERIA AND BIAFRA**

35. By The time Civil War broke out, nobody (Military and Civilians) was expecting a prolonged war and the Nigeria's victory was a foregone conclusion, considering Biafra's many handicaps at the time. Gowon, the Head of State said that Nigeria would prosecute a 'Police War' to bring the rebels back to their senses. The then Chief of Staff, Brigadier HU Katsina said the Civil War would end within 48 hours. The problems of prosecuting a war, which Nigeria was doing for the first time, could not be put in simplistic forms as expressed above.

36. Any commander will be anxious to terminate the agonies of a war as early as possible. But certain obvious constraints such as inadequate

logistics support can always be a handicap to operational effectiveness. The burden of logistics for the Civil War fell on the various Services Headquarters. Obviously the senior officers who directed the war lacked the practical experience to become sufficiently effective. The prevailing situation led to several command and control at the Army Headquarters. The result of this was that Field Commanders had very little respect for higher headquarters.

37. Nigeria obviously had a better logistics management system. For instance, the Federal Troops were given free food regularly; they were also given free drinks, cigarettes and uniform. Their morale was high with the determination to unite Nigeria. The slogan “To keep Nigeria one, a task that must be done” was on every soldier’s lip. On the other hand, in Biafra it was virtually “**every man for himself, God for us all**”. The blockade coupled with other economic measures implied that very little was available to distribute in terms of food and arms.

38. There were many paramilitary civil organizations such as the Red Cross and Civil Defence which sprang up in every corner of Nigeria, particularly after the invasion of Mid-Western Region. There were many contributions in cash and in materials by the civilians in support of the war effort. There were also many ‘Vigilante’ groups who were assisting the Federal Government to detect the saboteurs. In addition, there were readily available vehicles that could be hired or even commandeered.

39. The Federal troops had every advantage for better admin and higher morale since they had all the good logistics including good transport and

better weapons. In spite of the obvious advantages, the field commanders on the Federal side were sometimes found lacking in experience and even discipline. Expectedly, such flaws helped to prolong this fratricidal war.

### **THE BIAFRAN FORCE**

40. The morale of the Biafran populace was already shattered as a result of massive killings in the North and the eventual repatriation of the survivors. The Biafran Armed Forces was small and ill-equipped compared to their opponents. However, their effective propaganda against the Federal Government and their determination to survive, the Biafrans resuscitated their morale and managed to organize their administrative support for the Army throughout the War period.

41. A well equipped army with poor administrative support cannot sustain its achievements and success. But, an ill-equipped army with poor administrative support should never go to war if it can be avoided. Unfortunately for the Biafran Army, going to war became inevitable. Before the war, the fledging Biafran Army was almost completely administered and maintained by donations from civil population. This arrangement was considered unsuitable for an army that was to engage in combat at short notice. The truth however, was that Biafra did not expect it would be involved in any shooting war at a short notice.

42. When the War broke out, Biafran army was in serious dilemma. The blockade by Nigeria further worsened the situation. They were in short supply of every essential logistic support-food, fuel, transport, uniforms, etc. Biafra was anxious to survive and fight the War, so they formed various

paramilitary organizations such as the Militia to perform the following functions:

- a. To provide a ready source of manpower reinforcement for the regular army.
  - b. To assist with military administration immediately behind the frontlines.
  - c. To garrison all areas captured or regained from the enemy.
  - d. To help educate the population on the reasons why Biafra was fighting.
43. After the disbandment of the Militia, Biafra organized a guerrilla outfit, called the Biafran Organisation of Freedom Fighters (BOFF) to assist the regular army. In addition to the above, the Biafran government created an administrative directorate to cater for both the military and the civil population of the country. Foremost among these were the Food, Fuel, Transport and Clothing Directorates. The Food Directorate was by far the largest of the lot. It was controversial and extremely difficult to run.

44. Several other directorates such as Clothing, Housing, Propaganda, Requisition and Supply and Medical rendered invaluable assistance to the Armed Forces. The clothing directorate was the closest to the Army as clothing was the first administrative difficulty experienced by the Biafran Army. With limited resources available to it, it was obvious that the Biafran Army could not win a war against Nigeria, because the Nigerian Army, with all the available resources, good admin and morale support, was a formidable force in comparison with the young and ill-equipped Biafran

Army.

45. The morale of the Biafran soldier was at an all time low by mid December 1969, when Ojukwu was still talking confidently for repelling fresh federal advances. The swift collapse of the 12 Division of the Biafran Army coupled with the abandonment of a vital food producing area led to a disastrous lowering of morale among the soldiers and civilian populace in Biafra. The hunger situation became more serious due to the huge and uncontrollable civilian influx into the liberated areas. All these factors, coupled with the Nigerian domination of the air space led to the eventual surrender of Biafra on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1970.

### **THE ROLE OF MERCENARIES IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR**

46. It is generally believed that mercenaries and the International connivance or conspiracy helped to unduly prolong the Nigerian Civil War. Using soldiers of fortune in the Nigerian context may not be too correct a definition (JJ Oluleye 1985, p. 151). The Federal Government realised that the use of white mercenaries would reflect negatively upon its own capacity to prosecute the war and, in some critical African eyes, constitute an infringement on its sovereignty. On both sides the use of mercenaries became a question of pride and prejudice.

47. Moreover, the Nigerians were determined to show the world that they could cope with their 'internal problems' themselves, and for this the moral and diplomatic backing of the OAU was vital. But the Biafrans, the underdogs, could afford to worry less about world opinion and prestige. It was the general perception that they were fighting for survival and would

therefore deal with the devil if, necessary. Foreign mercenaries of note on the Biafran side were Steiner, Priest, and Von Rosen. On the Nigerian side, were non-combat mercenaries such as Nigerian gun-runners, Russian instructors for the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Airforce, as well as Egyptian pilots. The Civil War opened with hysterical accusations by both sides about the enemy's mercenaries. Radio Biafra once charged the Nigerians with using two battalions of British troops. Lagos also claimed that Ojukwu was employing 'Chinese' (or Chinese looking) soldiers and white mercenaries painted black. Throughout the war Nigeria was constantly being accused of hiring foreigners to fight in the army, but there was really no evidence to support such claims. To substantiate the above, it was alleged that a colourful figure who made a floating appearance in Lagos was Colonel Herbert Fauntlercy Julian, also known as 'Black Eagle of Harlem'. He was an American Negro pilot who had flown for the Ethiopians against the Italians in 1935. He was in his early seventies. He offered his service to the Federal Government, and was politely turned down. It was a different matter when it came to the war in the air. The Russians would not fly the planes they had sold to the Nigerians, nor would they permit westerners to do so. The choice then fell on the Egyptian pilots. But before then in July 1967, John Peter, a tough, ruthless English mercenary and 'mad' Mike Hoare's successor in the Congo had signed a contract with the Federal Government to recruit pilots to fly converted DC- 3s on bombing raids over Biafra.

### **FIELD COMMANDERS**

48. In discussing the part played by Field Commanders during the Civil

War on both sides, attention should be paid to their individual characteristics of command, evidence of tactical innovations, qualities of leadership and particularly their administrative style and adherence to principles of war. Since the field commanders on both sides were formerly brothers at arms, who trained together in the same military institutions, had almost equal knowledge of the terrains and other similar characteristics, it is assumed that tactically, they had identical proven ability. The area of military equipment and hard wares available to the individual commander for prosecuting the war on either side was perceived as the factor that could mean the difference in the level of performance.

49. Many Nigerian and foreign authors, such as Gen O. Obasanjo, Gen JJ Oluleye, Gen Madiebo, Lt Gen TY Danjuma, Major Ademoyega and John de St Jorre have written in different tones on the Civil War. They mentioned most of the individual field commanders. Candidates are therefore advised to read some of these books to broaden their detailed knowledge of the Field Commanders as a supplement to the information provided in succeeding parts of this write-up.

### **OLUSEGUN OBASANJO**

50. Olusegun Obasanjo hails from Abeokuta in Ogun State. He joined the Army in the late fifties and was trained at Mons Officers Cadet School Aldershot, UK. He was commissioned into the Nigerian Army Engineer Corps and maintained a quiet career in the Army until the outbreak of the Civil War.

51. Col O Obasanjo came into the light of Nigerian History when he was

appointed General Officer Commanding the 3 Marine Commandos, relieving its former commander Col Benjamin Adekunle. He took over when the Division had lost the town of Owerri and as a result, the morale of the troops was very low. Within a few months, however, Col Obasanjo dramatically restored confidence in his command. With heavy reinforcement of all kinds he reversed the defensive mentality of the Federal troops to an aggressive one leading for the stability in that sector. Obasanjo had a very high presence of mind and remained calm in difficult circumstances. His outlook belied his high intellect. He had a clear perception of most situations and played by the rule.

52. Col Obasanjo led his command in battles to compel the rebels to surrender on 12 January, 1970. It was he who received the draft statement of surrender from the Chief of Staff, Biafran Army, Major General Philip Effiong. Col Obasanjo went to become a General, and Nigerian Head of State between February 1976 and Oct 1979. He was prudent and, systematic in his administrative style. He always got the job done no matter what.

53. Olusegun Obasanjo can be described as unassuming and talented leader who was cautious in whatever he set himself to do. A gifted engineer, whose talent in his field was overshadowed by his national prominence as a statesman; he inspired his subordinates greatly and was always ready to listen to the opinions of Field Commanders before taking most decisions.

### **BENJAMIN ADEKUNLE (BLACK SCORPION)**

54. Col Benjamin Adekunle was popularly known as the “Black Scorpion” during the Civil War. Adekunle was of mixed parentage i.e. of

Yoruba father and a Bachama mother. He trained in Sandhurst where he was adjudged of average ability. He served as normal infantry officer and only came into prominence when he led the sea-borne assaults on Bonny and the Midwest.

55. Black Scorpion was often described as a very competent officer and an all-rounder that rarely delegated responsibility to subordinates. His ability to speak the three main Nigerian languages and many other dialects became an asset to his operations. His division was an amorphous mixture of old and new soldiers from practically every tribe in Nigeria. It is to his credit that he was able to instil discipline and wield his division into recognizable and popular 3 Marine Commando. The result was some spectacular success in Port Harcourt, Calabar, Aba and Owerri at the peak of his command. He eventually lost his command to Gen Olusegun Obasanjo in April 1969.

56. Adekunle had remarkable talents for getting things done and this endeared him to most citizens as a national hero. He was however, known for iron discipline and in some areas embarked on unorthodox measures to instill fear into his officers and soldiers. His successes were therefore costly in terms of material resources and human life.

57. Often regarded as aggressive and dynamic, his unpredictable temperament often created morbid fear among the officers and soldiers in his division. Although he possessed good tactical abilities, his un-canning ability to disregard logistics and his penchant for adventure were not regarded as sterling qualities. Little wonder therefore that he was replaced as GOC just before the Civil War.

**GEN MURTALLA MOHAMMED**

58. General Murtalla Mohammed has often been described as a kind-hearted bully. An ardent and almost fanatic Muslim, Murtalla hailed from Kano and was often described as fiery, stubborn, bold and fearless. He hardly tolerated opposition and believed that every human organisation was a military machine, which could be worked to the extreme limits of endurance. Under this impetuous leadership, 2 Inf Div raised in a hurry swept through the Midwest where it enjoyed the crucial and vital support of the anti-Biafran civilians and in the process chased out the Biafrans faster than they entered Midwest.

59. Murtalla always believed in his vision and his bold and audacious command style became very popular. However, the euphoria of this flamboyant style was carried a little too far during the 3 attempts to cross the River Niger at Onitsha. His intuitive reliance on divine intervention coupled with the inability to plan operations in detail contributed immensely to the aborted crossings of the Niger.

60. As a Field Commander, he was always in haste and in fact, it is on record that he led his troops on the fastest and longest possible advance in recorded history.

61. Murtalla's third attempt to cross River Niger almost ended in a mutiny as chaos and open disobedience were common. Obviously, there was serious disagreement between Gen Murtala and some of his field commanders. It is to his credit that he agreed to abandon the idea of an opposed river crossing after the third attempt.

62. After 3 disastrous outings, Murtala reorganized his Division and went overland to capture Onitsha. Although this was costly in terms of men, equipment and time, Murtala carried the credit of capturing Onitsha - the highly prized but largely destroyed commercial nerve centre of the East.

63. While adhering to some principles of war such as maintenance of momentum and speed, Murtala may have inadvertently but blatantly disregarded other principles such as secrecy, surprise and flexibility. It may be instructive to know that some Field Commanders are ready to make wholesome sacrifices to attain specified objectives. Where resources became the critical factor, it is doubtful if the attempted crossings by Murtala and the subsequent loss of lives and equipment would be viewed lightly. The situation could even be viewed more seriously if the crossings since the crossings when done in open disobedience to Appropriate Superior Authority (ASA) - if there were any such thing during the war.

64. In spite of these setbacks, Murtala and his Division rose from this trauma and in their various ways contributed immensely to end the war; Murtala went on to enhance the NA communication system and 2 Div Inf went on to capture Onitsha.

65. To many, Murtala remains a hero who fought and died for the cause of his fatherland. Murtala was brutally killed in 1975 in the Dimka's coup, after becoming the Head of State of Nigeria and Commander-in-Chief.

### **COL MAMMAN SHUWA**

66. Col Mamman Shuwa hailed from Borno and a Shuwa Arab by

extraction. He attended the famous Barewa College and was a classmate to Murtala Mohammed. Both proceeded to Delhi and then the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, in the UK. They were commissioned into the Nigerian Army in the late fifties.

67. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Col Mamman Shuwa as he was then known was given the command of 1 Infantry Division whose original HQ was at Kaduna. He led 1 Division at the inception of the war in its capture of Ogoja, Obudu, Nsukka and Enugu. Col Bissala relieved him after the fall of Enugu.

68. Major General Mamman Shuwa as he later became known served as Federal/Commissioner for Trade in the Murtala/Obasanjo regimes after which he voluntarily retired into civil life.

69. Mamman Shuwa was known to be a very meticulous and worthy leader. Although orthodox at times he planned his operation down to the very detail. He is often described as a loner with a fiery temper who always demanded high standards from his subordinates. He was also known to be extremely considerate when it came to matters of welfare of his men.

### **TY DANJUMA**

70. Col TY was a Major when the war broke out, and Col TY Danjuma, (later rose to the rank of Lt Gen and COAS). He was Staff Officer under the Commander of the 1st Infantry Division, and became a great asset to the Div Commander because unlike the later, he had a taste of Staff College training. 1 Div at that time consisted of the entire old Nigerian Army. The

known high standard of discipline was maintained even after the injection of many raw recruits into the Division.

71. On arrival at Nsukka from an overseas Staff Course, Major Danjuma (then temporary Lt Col) made a quick survey of the true situation and made several swift decisions. In the first place he found that the Divisional HQ at Makurdi was too far away to be effective. This was the most hostile sector of the war at the time. He made sure the line of communication from the rear was secured.

72. He believed in management by objective. He called a series of brain storming sessions at Brigade HQ where he sought advice from every officer no matter his rank. At the end of this exercise his mind was made up about the general strategy that he would adopt for a swift push to Enugu. Having secured Enugu, he helped to supervise the move of the Div HQ from Makurdi to Enugu.

73. Except for a short period during the rest of the war when he was posted to Kaduna, he spent the entire time of the War commanding his troops from Enugu and continued the push to end the War. He was quoted as having said “I was there to win war not to stop it”. He was said to be one of the most benevolent and sympathetic commanders to prisoners of war and refugees. There were also ample testimonies to his activities in helping the civilian communities behind the lines to restore their lives once the war ended in such areas. The capability of Col Danjuma is reinforced by the comments made in his confidential report by the then Chief of Army Staff Major General David Ejor. He wrote “Colonel Danjuma is a soldier, a

gentleman, and an outstanding officer. His integrity is exceptional. He is unswerving in allegiance to the Service; and to seniors and juniors alike”.

### **ALEXANDER MADIEBO**

74. Maj Gen Alexander A Madiebo was a Lt Col in the Nigeria Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. He rose to the rank of Maj Gen in the Biafran Army. As Commander of the Biafran Army, Maj Gen Madiebo (now retired) wrote a book based on his war diary. He recorded in detail the Prosecution of the War from the initial battle around Ogoja and Nsukka to the final drive through the "Ibo Heart Land" and the collapse of the Biafran forces following the recapture of Owerri.

75. As the Commander of the Nigeria Army Artillery Regiment prior to the outbreak of the war, he was also an eyewitness of the two coups of January and July 1966. His vivid narration of his escape to the East during the second coup is very adventurous. He escaped with Ojukwu to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, a day before the Biafran surrender.

### **VICTOR BANJO**

76. As a Lt Col in the Nigerian Army he was one of the leaders of the first (Jan 15, 66) coup in Nigeria. Like his other friends who took part in the coup he was detained. He was in the Enugu prison during the crisis, which led to the secession of the Eastern Region. Ojukwu released him along with other coup plotters. He fought on the side of Biafra during the Civil War. He was made the Commander of the troops that invaded Mid-West and went as far as Ore. But experts claimed that invasion was the greatest tactical mistake by

the Biafran Army. According to Lt Col Madiebo in 'The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War' referring to the invasion said of Banjo: "All activities of the Colonel (Banjo) were clouded with unnecessary secrecy and mystery and invariably failed totally.

77. From the moment Banjo reached Benin, John de St Jorre said, little went right for the Biafrans in the Mid-West. Instead of pushing on to Ibadan and Lagos, he stalled making speeches, setting up his own administration confusing Enugu as much as the enemy. Banjo already saw himself as an independent military commander, a dynamic political force, and showed every sign of trying to continue the grand revolutionary design sketched out by the young majors in January 1966.

78. He professed that the secession of Biafra began the dismemberment of our nation. Slipping out of control, disobeying orders calling himself a 'Nigerian' and announcing his intention to fight for one Nigeria. This naturally infuriated Ojukwu who abruptly recalled him to Enugu. Banjo was roped into a plot that was to overthrow Ojukwu and bring about an end to secession. He was tried along with others (Maj Ifeajuna, Mr Alele and Mr Agbam) and having been found guilty were publicly executed.

### **JOE ACHUZIE**

79. Colonel Joe 'Hannibal' Achuzie was Biafran's most energetic Field Commander. He was an unknown figure before the war, but he claimed to have served in the British Army but not in the Nigerian Army. He organised a counter attack almost immediately the Federal troops captured Enugu. Achuzie was one of those commissioned civilians that Ojukwu used to

checkmate the alleged ambitions of the regular officers.

80. He was one of such field commanders on whom Ojukwu kept a strict eye and changed round if they became too popular or successful. He lost one command this way. The mysterious Colonel Joe 'Hannibal' Achuzie, had before the war ran an electrical business in Port Harcourt and before that he had lived in Britain where he married his English wife, Ethel. His nickname was also a mystery as there was nothing remotely resembling either the Alps or elephants in Biafra- but presumably it came as recognition of his military prowess which was genuine enough.

81. He was said to be a rough and rough soldier who inspired the same fear and respect in his men as Adekunle did; he also has a good tactical sense and could move his troops around with more speed than most of the Commanders on either side. He was responsible for the huge ambush at Abagana, and played a leading part in the recapture of Owerri. But, unfortunately for Biafra's military fortunes, Ojukwu pulled him back at about the same time that Adekunle lost his command. He however went back to fight on, and in fact, he supported Effiong in carrying out the surrender after Ojukwu had flown away. Col Hannibal always engaged in spectacular stunts to prove that civilians commissioned were as good as or even better than regular officers.

### **TIMOTHY ONWUATUEGWU**

82. Colonel Timothy Onwuatuegwu was one of the five 'Majors' who executed the first Nigerian coup. Like the others he was arrested and detained. Having been released by Ojukwu from Enugu prisons he fought on

the side of Biafra during the Civil War. He was a well disciplined field commander who was very successful in the Aba Sector, where he was a tower of strength; Ojukwu removed him from the Aba Sector as a result of the former's policy of removing effective commanders if they became too popular or successful. This was Ojukwu's way of maintaining his tight grip on the Army. This probably did Biafra more harm than good in the long run.

### **PHILIP EFFIONG**

83. Philip Effiong, then a Lt Col, was one of the senior Eastern Region officers that fled Nigeria during the crisis of 1966. In the East when it became increasingly clear to the Government that the Army could hardly hold back the Federal troops, the need arose to reorganise all Militia Units into an effective and disciplined force under one command. Effiong, who was then a Brigadier, was appointed to command this force with special emphasis on administration. The Militia was to be given such tasks as:

- a. Providing a ready source of man-power reinforcement for the regular Army.
- b. Assisting with military administration immediately behind the front lines.
- c. To garrison all areas captured or regained from the enemy.
- d. To help educate the population on the reasons why Biafra was fighting.

84. Immediately after the declaration of Biafra on 30th of July 1967, General Effiong (then a Col) was alarmed at the administrative chaos within

the army. He submitted a paper to Ojukwu suggesting an administrative set-up for the Army; giving details of the army administrative (support) requirements for six months in the event of war. Effiong's paper was discarded as being too expansive and out of tune with the requirements of the Biafran Army. This was later regretted.

85. Maj Gen Effiong took an active part in the prosecution of the Civil War. He became the Chief of Staff, Biafran Armed Forces. Ojukwu handed over the prosecution of the War and the administration of Biafran territory to him before he (Ojukwu) and his entourage fled the Biafran enclave.

86. Maj Gen Effiong was thus left behind to play the last honourable, but sad and difficult task of undertaker for Biafra. It was he who pronounced the surrender of the Biafran Army to the Federal Government and renounced the existence and sovereignty of Biafra on January 12, 1970. An honourable act indeed and a significant one which brought to an end 30 months of fratricidal hostilities.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **REVISION**

#### **SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Answer the following questions, using sketches where necessary:
  - a. Mention some causes of the Nigerian Civil War.
  - b. Enumerate the decisions reached at Aburi Conference. Why were they rejected by Gen Gowon?
  - c. Enumerate how recruitment, training and procurement of arms were carried out by both Nigeria and Biafra during the Civil War.
  - d. The fall of Garkem was due to lack of adequate fire support. Comment on this assertion.
  - e. Describe the battle of Enugu and the reasons for the Biafran failure.
  - f. The invasion of the Mid-West by the Biafran troops has often been described as the high water of the Biafran exploits in the Civil War. Discuss.
    - (1) Describe how the Biafrans achieved this feat and the reasons for their short-lived success.
    - (2) Describe how the Federal troops recaptured the Mid-West.
  - g. Give an account of 2 Inf Div attempts at the crossing of the River Niger and the subsequent capture of Onitsha.

**HINTS ON SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

2. a. The following points are expected to be well discussed on the political background to the Nigerian civil war.
  - (1) The quest for a weak central government and strong regions.
  - (2) The early post-independence disturbances.
  - (3) Crisis within the Action Group and detention of political leaders.
  - (4) The unacceptable 1962 Census and the grudging acceptance of 1963 census.
  - (5) The Tiv Riots.
  - (6) The General Election of 1964.
  - (7) The crisis-ridden Western Regional Election of 1965.
  - (8) The 15 January 1966 coup and change of political balance.
- b. Some forms of reconciliatory moves were made by the following bodies:
  - (1) The Aburi Conference chaired by Gen Ankrah of Ghana.
  - (2) The decisions reached at the Conference.
  - (3) The Consultative Assembly.
  - (4) The Leaders of thought and their effort at preventing an outbreak of war.
- c. Account of the Preparation and Mobilization for War. The following points are to be expatiated upon in answering these questions:
  - (1) On the Nigerian side:

- (a) Recruitment of personnel.
- (b) Employment of local and international gun runners.
- (c) The plan on employment of troops.
- (d) The fact that the mobilization effort at the initial stage was very lax.

(2) On the Biafran side:

- (a) Training of officer cadets.
- (b) Security Procurement of arms from France and South Africa.
- (c) The setting up civil administrative directorates.

d. **Garkem, Obudu and Ogoja Battles - Reasons for Biafran Defeat.** The student is expected to give the details of the battles as read from the precis and other books. They should also note that these were the first battles of the War. The following reasons for the Biafran defeat are expected to be mentioned:

- (1) Lack of trained troops.
- (2) Poor preparation.
- (3) Lack of fire support.
- (4) Poor communications.
- (5) The sheer size of fire support available to the Federal forces.

e. A brief description of the Battle of Enugu is expected to discuss Lt Col Danjuma's plan, his execution of the plan and the costly mistake of not exploiting his immediate advantage of the capture of Enugu. The reasons for the success of the Federal troops were as a

result of their superiority in training. 1 Inf Div had better trained soldiers as well as superior weapons and equipment over the Biafrans. Enugu was completely deserted and its capture was thus made easier. The Biafrans had no chances as the ‘troops’ meant for the defence of the town had no weapons. They were all issued with cutlasses for this arduous task. In fact 10,000 able bodied men imported into Enugu became more of logistics than fighting problems.

f. **The capture of the Mid-West by Biafrans.** In answering these questions, the important points that students are expected to recount would be:

- (1) The Biafran motive for the operation.
- (2) The failure of Federal Government’s plan for the defence of the Mid-West.
- (3) Reasons for easy success of Banjo’s troops in capturing the Mid-West.
- (4) The Biafran troops’ costly mistake of not exploiting their initial success.
- (5) The ease with which the Mid-West was recaptured.

g. **The Crossing of River Niger.** The student is expected to give a brief account of the 3 disastrous attempts at an opposed crossing of the River Niger. In addition, the reasons for these failed attempts should also be mentioned. A brief account of the Battle of Onitsha after the long tortuous trek through Idah should be highlighted.

**OTHER REVISION QUESTIONS**

3.
  - a. Give five reasons for the easy capture of Benin by the Biafrans and the factors that aided the recapture of Benin by the Federal troops.
  - b. Using the capture of Garkem by the Federal troops and Benin by Biafran troops as case studies, highlight the importance of momentum as a principle of war?
  - c. Why was the crossing of the River Niger at Asaba the greatest disaster of the civil war? How Onitsha was finally captured?
  - d. Describe Operation:
    - (1) Tiger Claw.
    - (2) OAU.
  - e. State three major reasons why Uli Airstrip was not captured throughout the civil war?
  - f. What problems faced the Nigerian Airforce and Biafran Airforce at the inception of the Civil War?
  - g. Give a detailed account of the Nigerian Navy during the Civil War. Cite instances?
  - h. What are the major advantages of joint operations? Relate this to the capture of Bonny, Port-Harcourt and Calabar.
  - i. What is the relationship between the Political and economic undertones to the secession of the Eastern Nigeria?
  - i. Mention 3 economic undertones to the secession of the Eastern Nigeria.
  - k. Discuss the role of the civil servants in the Nigerian and Biafran efforts during the Civil War.

- l. What measures were the measures taken by the Federal Government to ensure stability of Nigeria's economy and the disruption of the rebel efforts?
- m. How was the Biafran propaganda Bureau organised to fight the psychological operation war?
- n. Write short notes on:
  - (1) Biafra's Home Press Service (HPS).
  - (2) Biafra's Propaganda Directorate (BPD).
  - (3) Limitation of Biafra's Propaganda machinery in the Civil War.
- o. What factors militated against high morale among the Biafran troops during the Nigerian Civil War?
- p. How effective was the Nigerian para military set up in the Nigerian Civil War?
- q. Why was Nigeria cautious in the employment of mercenaries to prosecute the civil war?
- r. Write short notes on each of the following field Commanders:
  - (1) Col O Obasanjo.
  - (2) Col TY Danjuma.
  - (3) Maj Gen A Madiebo.
  - (4) Col V Banjo.
- s. Give a brief account of the political background to the Nigerian Civil War.
- t. What were the efforts made by various national and international bodies and governments to prevent the outbreak of the Civil War?

- u. Give an account of the mobilization and preparation for war on both sides.
- v. "The political and economic undertones to the secession of Eastern Nigeria are inseparable" Discuss your stand on the issue.
- w. Explain the reason for the success of Biafran Psyops in the Nigerian/Biafran conflict.
- x. Discuss the part played by Civil Organizations and para-military set-up in the term "survival of Biafra".
- aa. Economic warfare rather than guns in the battle defeated Biafra". Discuss.
- bb. Mercenaries were responsible for the undue prolongation of the Nigerian Civil War. Discuss.
- cc. Enumerate the underlying factors that limited Nigeria's use of mercenaries during the Civil War.
- dd. Compare and contrast, Col BA Adekunle and Col Achuzie's style of command in the Nigerian Civil War.
- ee. Do you regard Col Murtala Mohammed a successful field commander? Discuss.

### **SPECIMEN CANDIDATE ANSWER**

4. **General.** Suggested DS solutions are usually long and deliberately contain a huge volume of details that would enable a DS to mark student's answer scripts objectively. Candidates usually attempt the impossible feat of producing a DS solution under examination conditions. While this may be ideal, students are advised to present facts concisely, logically and where practicable in point form. Answers must be brief but not too brief; must be

long enough but not too long.

5. **Sketches/Maps.** Sketches/Maps speak volumes. Effort must be made by candidates to support their answers with neat and presentable sketches, especially now that they have been included in the new modules. While candidates are not expected to reproduce the exact details contained in the sketches, they should endeavour to bring out the salient features/information contained in them.

### **QUESTION**

6. Describe the 3 unsuccessful attempts by 2 Inf Div to cross the River Niger at Asaba. What were the major lessons learnt?

### **ANSWER**

7. **Introduction.** The string of success by 2 Inf Div during the liberation of the Midwest informed Col Murtala's decision to attempt a bounce crossing when he got to Asaba. Although, conditions were not ideal for such a crossing, it was believed that the continued maintenance of the momentum of advance would compel the fleeing Biafran Forces to retreat beyond Onitsha. Unknown to the Federal troops, there was a deliberately prepared defence at Onitsha. Besides, the Asaba-Onitsha Bridge had been prepared for reserved demolition.

8. **The Forces Involved.**

- a. Nigeria 2 Inf Div comprising 7, 8 and 9 Bdes.

- b. Biafra remnants of the Midwest Expeditionary Forces consisting of a depleted 11, 12 and 18 Battalions.
9. **Aim.** The aim of the crossing was to maintain the momentum of the Federal troops advance.

10. **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

a. **Nigeria.** 2 Inf Div did not make any elaborate preparation for the crossing apart from securing a few boats and ferries. They relied on the momentum of the advance.

b. **Biafra.**

(1) The Asaba-Onitsha Bridge was the link with other parts of Nigeria. It was therefore imperative to ensure it remained open.

(2) 11, 12 and 18 Battalions took up a positional defence along the shoreline at Onitsha. Well fortified bunkers as well as communication trenches were constructed along the bank of the River.

(3) The Asaba-Onitsha Bridge was prepared for reserved demolition. In addition, the Asaba end of the Bridge was blocked with heavy machinery.

(4) Observation posts were created at various vantage points.

11. **Conduct.**

a. **First Attempt.** Troops of 2 Inf Div assembled about 300 metres from the Asaba end of the Asaba-Onitsha Bridge and the leading battalion was tasked to secure a foothold. The first wave consisted of 10 boats and some ferries. The crossing was carried out

at dusk and therefore troop movement was concealed from view of the far bank. Unknown to the troops of 2 Inf Div, Biafran troops who were dug-in at vantage positions, saw every move at the Asaba end. The Biafrans opened fire on the unsuspecting Federal troops who were now within killing range. Several boats were sunk but elements of 2 Inf Div successfully landed at the Onitsha end. After some close quarter fighting, the Biafrans were overwhelmed and they fled the town to reorganize. The Federal troops got into town, set the Onitsha market ablaze but could not organize and secure the town properly. The Biafrans soon organized a counter attack and before long most of the Federal troops started running for cover. This attempt failed largely because of inadequate preparation, poor tactics, indiscipline and adherence to the basic principles of war.

b. **Second Attempt.** 2 Inf Div forces decided on a second attempt from the very same spot that they tried the first attempt. This decision was considered a tactical blunder as the Biafran forces were in a better position to deal with the crossing troops. Besides, they also had better fire power as a result of captured arms and ammo. One week after the first crossing, a dawn crossing was attempted after heavy air raids for one week. For the same reasons as the first, the crossing elements could not even land at the Onitsha end. Most of the boats sank and a few managed to make it back to Asaba. Once again, the attempt to carry out a crossing failed woefully. It should be recalled that the Asaba-Onitsha Bridge was still intact at this time.

c. **Third Attempt.** By the time the third attempt was being planned, most of the officers and soldiers were frustrated and angry.

They felt betrayed and lost confidence in the command. Open disagreements were common. Lt Col Akinrinade who led the third attempt also had cause to disagree with his GOC. A third crossing was attempted but expectedly, it also failed. Thus ended on a rather disgraceful note the attempts to carry out an opposed river crossing by 2 Inf Div.

12. **Lessons Learnt From the Failed Crossing.** The failed attempts at crossing the River Niger at Asaba brought out the following:

- a. The need for thorough reconnaissance and planning for a river crossing operation.
- b. The need for a thorough understanding of the mechanics of river crossing.
- c. The need for extensive engineer input into the planning of river crossing operation.
- d. The requirement for effective and sustainable fire support.
- e. The need for cooperation to ensure that support at all levels is made available for the crossing.
- f. The need for discipline at all levels especially when there is the possibility of getting into urban areas containing attractive goods or machinery.
- g. The need for strict adherence to the principles of war.
- h. The need for commanders to see their actions as complementary rather than competitive in trying to achieve the higher commander's intentions.
- i. The need to ensure an effective foothold and subsequent bridgehead before the break out in a river crossing operation.

- j. The need for deception measures in order to achieve surprise. A feint crossing and even landing would have made the difference.
- k. The need for discipline even among the senior field commanders.

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**MILITARY HISTORY**

**VOLUME 2**

**BURMA CAMPAIGN**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **PREAMBLE**

1. The history of World War II will never be complete without the Burma Campaign. Apart from the having one of the worst terrain and climates in the world, Burma has one of the fiercest battles of World War II. The campaign is therefore worthy of study.

2. Attempt will be made in the module to give an indepth analysis of the various operations in the campaign In addition; more maps and sketches have been included to make the operations more explicit. Furthermore, a deliberate attempt has been made to follow a particular format in describing each battle for a better understanding.

3. It is important to remember that there were two Chindit operations and three Arakan campaigns. However, the second Chindit did not occur immediately after the first. Similarly, the first and second Arakan campaigns were not conducted consecutively. The operations and campaigns are therefore described in the sequence they occurred.

4. Candidates are further encouraged to understand the course of each campaign or battle through a gradual and systematic review of every action. It is necessary for candidates to evaluate such actions with a view to determining why certain actions were successful while others failed. It is also important for candidates to identify which principles of war were either

adhered to or violated by the belligerents. By so doing, important lessons would be drawn from each battle.

5. **Instructional Objectives.** At the end of the module on Burma Campaign, the students will be able to review the campaign and explain the following:

- a. The causes of campaign including background information.
- b. The geography and how it affected the campaign.
- c. Briefly describe each battle or operation, bringing out the background, forces used, aim/mission, preparations and contact, reasons for failure or success and lessons learnt.
- d. Higher direction of the campaign.
- e. Lessons learnt from the campaigns as a whole.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

6. Certain terms, phrases, abbreviations are peculiar to the Burma Campaign. It is important to briefly explain some of these for a better understanding of the module:

- a. **SEAC.** South- East Asia Allied Command was formerly in Aug 43 to control all allied Forces in Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, the Dutch, East Indies, SIAM AND Indo-China.
- b. **NCAC.** Northern Combat Area Command was the name given to the American led Chinese force initially under the command of Gen Joseph Stiwell.
- c. **BAA.** Burma Area Army was the command controlling all Japanese forces operating in Burma.

- d. **BNA**. The Burma National Army was a puppet army made up of Burmese, trained, equipped and organized into units under Japanese officers.
- e. **INA**. The Indian National Army was the force raised by the Japanese from Indian civilians and prisoners of war under the puppet government of one Bose.
- f. **LRP**. Long Range Penetration was the name given to the two specific expeditions of the group which penetrated behind enemy areas in Burma. The forces were commanded by Brig Gen (later Maj Gen) Wingate.
- g. **The Hump**. The Hump was the name given to the great mountain range between Assam and China and to the airfields in the Brahmaputra valley.
- h. **The Hump Route**. The Hump Route was the air supply route to China set up after the closing of the Burma Road as a result of the Japanese invasion.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE CAMPAIGN**

7. The allies in the words of Lieutenant General Joseph W Stilwell alias 'Vingar Joe' had taken 'a hell of a beating in the first stages of the Burma Campaign. They were caught unprepared by the Japanese invasion in Jan 42 and had to retreat for about 900 miles to India. The bitter experiences, including several disasters during the withdrawal, put the Allies in no good stead to launch any meaningful operation in many months to come. Even so, by the end of 1942 the British had begun to think of going over to the offensive. Early in 1943, they made a thrust down the Arakan coast with

the object of recapturing Akyab and its airfield, but this proved a costly failure. The truth is that morale was low at this time. The Japanese soldier had come to be regarded as a kind of superman. That aside, the allied soldiers had to contend with sickness which was having a serious damaging effect on both their physical and mental well-being. A high sick rate is usually an indication of low morale. In 1942 for every man wounded, 120 were being sent back sick. At the end of the year one division, 17,000 strong had 5,000 sick. Malaria, dysentery, mite typhus and skin diseases all took their toll.

8. It was at this time that Brigadier Orde Wingate appeared on the scene. Experience of guerrilla warfare in Palestine and Abyssinia had led him to conceive the idea of long range penetration, and this had contrived to 'sell' to Winston Churchill, who was often receptive to unorthodox ideas and willing to encourage a commander who wanted to fight. Wingate was allowed to raise a 'private army', the Chindits, and with this force he waged war beyond the Chindwin from Feb 43. His men cut the Mandalay Myitkyina railway in seventy-five places exploits which generally speaking left the Japanese unimpressed, for, unlike the Germans, they were not particularly sensitive about being raided. But, thanks to the Pres, the morale effect on the Allies was quite different. Although the Chindits had endured terrible hardships and had been compelled to abandon many of the sick and wounded, they had shown that they could take on the Japanese in the jungle. The myth of the Japanese superman began to dissolve. Wingate had moreover demonstrated the value of air supply. He himself enjoyed in the eyes of the British public reputation akin to that of TE Lawrence in the first World War, and despite his eccentricities, he was clearly a very talented

soldier. At the same time he was unscrupulous about getting his own way, and having direct access to the Prime Minister, an unwarrantable by-passing of the normal military channels was now able, at the expense of Fourteenth Army, to build his brigade into a division.

9. In Aug 43 another young and brilliant commander came on the scene. This was Lord Louis Mountbatten, a member of the British Royal Family. At the beginning of the war he had been a dashing destroyer captain. Later he had scored notable successes as Chief of Combined Operations. Now at the early age of forty-three he was made supreme Commander of the newly created South-East-Asia Command (SEAC). It will be wrong to underrate Mountbatten as a strategist, but his greatest asset was that he had an inspiring personality. His broad of leadership appealed to the men of his command, and his tireless visits to every kind of unit were a real factor in raising morale.

10. The improvement in Fourteenth Army was partly a question of improving its health, and to some extent this was simply a matter of discipline. The strictest health precautions were needed, for example in seeing that every man took his daily mepacrine tablet to prevent malaria.

11. Mountbatten's immediate object was to reopen land communication with China. To this end American engineer, with coolie labour, had been building the Lido road, begun in Dec 42 and eventually completed in the Jan 45. This was to be extended so as to join the old Burma Road at Mongyu near Lashio. Fuel pipelines were to be built from Calcutta to Assam and parallel to the Ledo road. Supplies over the Hump were to be

increased to 20,000 tons a month.

12. The key to the reconquest of Burma was air supply. As Admiral Mount batten himself pointed out: "It was not just a question of auxiliary air supply, because 96 per cent of our air supplies to the Fourteenth Army went by Air: In the cause of this campaign we lifted 615,000 tons of Supplies to the armies, three quarters of it by the US Air Force and one quarter by the Royal Air Force: 315,000 reinforcement Were flown out in. In addition, 11,000 casualties were flown out in our best month- March 1945 we actually lifted 94,300 tons. During that time the American Air transport Command were Building up their 'Hump' traffic, so that by July they had reached Their peak of 77,500 tons per month". This administrative effort was backed by improvisation, perhaps taking cognizance of the Eight Army motto, '**God help those who help themselves**'. The crossing of the Irrawaddy using improvised flotilla was a classic example of the ingenuity of the officers and soldiers of Eight Army in Burma.

13. No amount of administrative skill will win wars without soldiers prepared to fight with the skill and determination of the men who defended Imphal and Kohima. But stout hearted soldiers will still be defeated if they are not well commanded. In Sir William Slim the Fourteenth Army had a general of the highest caliber.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GEOGRAPHY AND BACKGROUND

1. The Geography of Burma played a significant role in the Burma Campaign. It is therefore important to be familiar with the location, terrain, drainage, climate and vegetation of Burma for a better understanding of the various operations.

2. **Location and Size.** Burma is a small country in South East Asia. It stretches from latitude  $10^{\circ}$  N to  $28^{\circ} 30'$  N. It is bothered by China in the North East, French Indo-China and Siam in the East, India in the West and North West and the Bay of Bengal in the South. It stretches 1,300 miles North to South and about 575 miles East to West. The total mass is approximately 260,000 square miles.

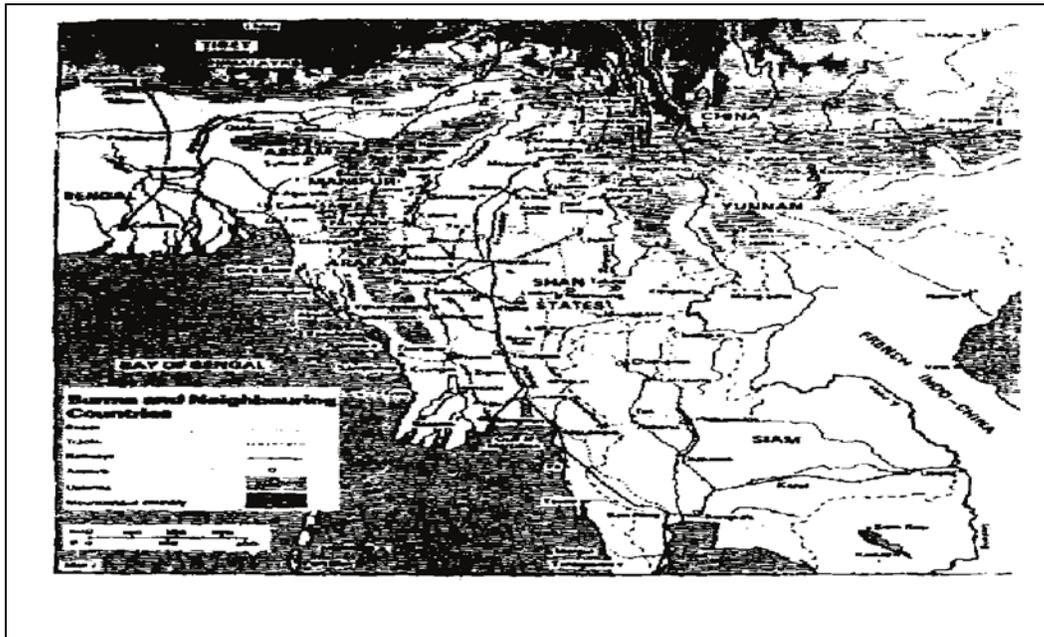
3. **Terrain.** Burma is composed of three main geomorphological structures; the Arakan Yoma, Shan Plateau and the Central Basin. These are further sub-divided into the following 7 natural regions:

a. **The Arakan Yoma.** The Arakan Yoma consists of series of fold ranges, forming a barrier between Burma and India. The foot hills of the Arakan stretches as far as the Bay of Bengal. The fold ranges include the Naga, China and the Lushai Hills as well as the Arakan Yoma. Some of these hills rise to 10,000 ft above Main Sea Level (MSL).

b. **The Shan Plateau.** The Shan Plateau occupies the whole stretch of the country and extends southward into Tenasserim. The plateau forms part of the Yunnan Plateau of Chin and its height

averages 3,000 ft above MSL.

- c. **The Northern Hills Basin.** The Northern Hills Basin comprise of the valleys of the Chinwin and the Upper Irrawaddy.
  - d. **The Dry Belt.** The Dry Belt lies in the heart of Burma and is part of the Central Basin.
  - e. **The Irrawaddy Delta.** The Irrawaddy belt is a low lying area with the various tributaries of the Irrawaddy River.
  - f. **The Tenessarium.** The Tenessarium is the narrow Southern extension of Burma which share boundaries with Siam. It measures 400 miles to the South and 40 miles East to West.
  - g. **The ARAKAN COAST.** The Arakan Coast is the West Coast line of Burma facing the Bay of Bengal.
4. **Climate.** Burma forms part of the Monsoon region of Asia, which its climate modified by the relief of the country. The three main seasons are:
- a. **The Cool Seasons.** The cool seasons starts towards the end of October and end in February. The season is rainless and characterized with high temperature and humidity.

**FIGURE 1: BURMA AND NEIBOURING COUNTRIES**

- b. **The Hot Season.** The hot season start from March and end in May and is also rainless. The average temperature during this period is  $80^{\circ} \text{F}$ . The temperature rises steeply away from the moderating influences of the sea.
- c. **The Rainy Season.** The rainy season begins from June to October. The change to the South West monsoon in this season is heralded by thunderstorms towards the end of May. This South-West monsoon blows from the Indian Ocean and is the rain-bearing wind. The Coastal region receives the full force of the wind, resulting in heavy rainfall. Most of Arakan has nearly 200 inches of rainfall annually while Rangoon enjoys 100 inches. The Arakan Yoma, the Shan Plateau and the Mandalay area in the belt receive scanty rainfall.
5. **Drainage.** The principal rivers in Burma area are the Chinwin to the

West, the Irrawaddy, draining the central parts of the Burma and the Salween, which drains the Shan Plateau. Other smaller rivers include the Naf-kaladan, Lemur, An, Sittang and the Teenasserim.

6. **Vegetation.** The vegetation of Burma follows the patterns of rainfall and to some extent, the relief. The following is distribution of the vegetation:

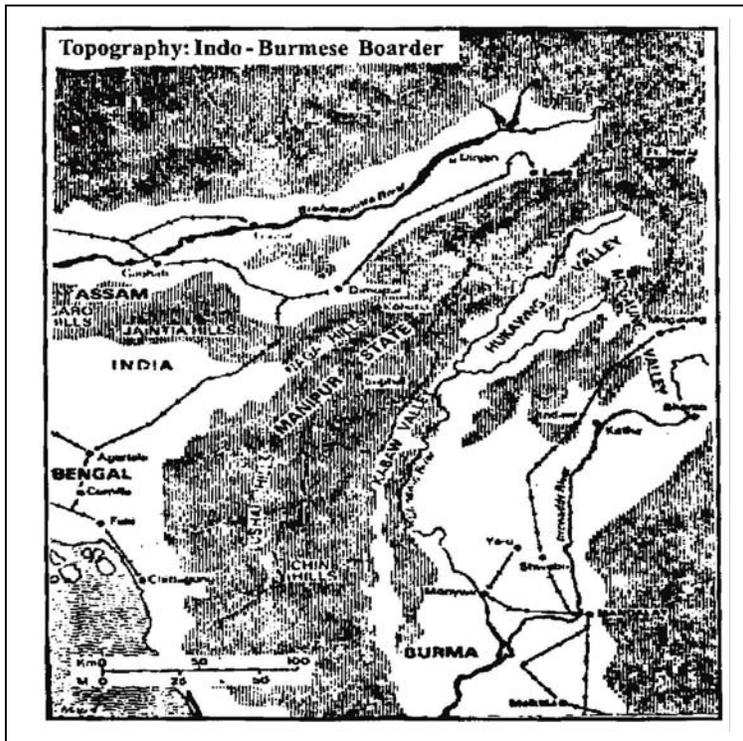
- a. **Rain Forest.** Ever green rain forest, occur in areas with over 80 inches of rainfall. The Irrawaddy Delta falls into this zone.
- b. **Monsoon Forest.** Monsoon Forest which loses its leaves during the hot season occurs in areas with 40-80 inches of rainfall.
- c. **Scrubland and Semi-desert.** Scrubland and semi-desert occur in areas with less than 40 inches of rainfall.

### **MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE THE GEOGRAPHY OF BURMA**

7. The geography of Burma played a significant role in military operations in the Burma Campaign. Burma, situated between the sub-continent and the rest of Asia, is not a corridor between any of these lands but a barrier. Though Rangoon played the role of a link between India and Burma, the two were never connected by rail. Even the few roads were not passable in the monsoon season. The isolation of Burma from India later had a powerful influence in the 1942 retreat as well as other battles to win back the Burmese territory from the Japanese in the later stages of the war. Furthermore, Rangoon served not only as a commercial centre but also as a centre of traffic between India and Burma. It constituted a natural strategic shield of the Japanese conquest in the South West Pacific. The Japanese

believed that once Burma was conquered, all threat to her conquest in Burma would be removed.

**FIGURE 2: PHYSICAL FEATURE OF BURMA**



8. The geography of Burma also affected operations in the following ways:

a. **Terrain**

- (1) Effect on movement of vehicles and personnel.
- (2) Influences tactics including battle formation.
- (3) General effects on operations.

b. **Climate**

- (1) Restrict operation to specific periods of the year.
- (2) Effect on men and equipment e.g. diseases are more

prevalent during certain seasons

c. **Vegetation**

- (1) Effect on movement.
- (2) Tactics affected.
- (3) Effect on visibility from air and ground obstacles.

d. **Drainage**

- (1). Constitutes obstacles.
- (2). Enhances supply.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

9. Burma was formerly two kingdoms made up of the Pyus and the Mons. These two tribes came into Burma in 500BC and 700 BC respectively. The two kingdoms were unified in 1014 BC but again broken up by the invasion of the Mongols in 1287 BC. They were again re-unified in 1757.

10. Burma fought in the Anglo-Burmese wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She fell to Britain after the third Anglo- Burmese war and annexed to Britain in 1885. Burma later became a province of India under British control.

11. The Burmese, which were the major race in Burma and had a clear national consciousness. They resented British rule particularly as a result of the refusal of British to continue state patronage of Buddhism. They were also not happy with British economic policies especially the linking of Burmese economy to India which impoverished much of the population. This led to the peasant uprising in 1931 and in 1937 the British separated Burma from India. It is important to realise that the Burmese desire for

freedom was deep-rooted, because this was to influence their attitude to the British and Indians when Japanese began to overrun their country.

### **REMOTE CAUSES OF BURMA CAMPAIGN**

12. The story of the entry of the Japanese into World War II began not in 1941 when she invaded smaller countries in South East Asia but earlier. The following events are identified as the remote causes of the Burma campaign:

- a. **Humiliation of Japan.** Between 1921 and 1925, Japan suffered series of humiliations in the hands of Western powers. First, British repudiated her alliance with Japan, an act they later regarded as an insult and proof that the white race is ganging against her. This sense of affront was worsened by successive American legislation restricting Japanese immigration, culminating in the act of 1942 which excluded Asians as immigrants.
- b. **World Economic Crises.** Japan also suffered from the world economic crises that developed in 1929. The resultant discontents enable Japanese militants to press home their argument that expansion was the solution to Japan's economic problems.
- c. **Japanese Expantionist Tendencies.** Japan though a small country had a great territorial ambitions. From 1931 onwards, she was engaged in expanding for foothold on the Asiatic main land at the expense of China. She invaded Manchuria in 1931 and penetrated China in 1932. She began to pursue a consistent policy of establishing her control in the Asiatic mainland from 1937. This attitude posed serious threats to the American and British interests in the area.

d. **Quest for Raw Materials.** Japan had many industries which required regular supply of raw materials. South East Asia was rich in some of the raw materials e.g. rubber, tin and wolfram. Japan felt that the conquest of Burma indeed South-East Asia would put this raw materials directly under Japanese control for both industrial use and for the manufacture of war materials.

e. **Quest for Market for Finished Goods.** The numerous industries in Japan were producing a lot of goods, all of which cannot be consumed within the country. South-East Asia including Burma was considered an ideal market for these goods.

f. **The War in Europe.** When Germany over ran Europe in 1940, Japan was tempted to enter the war along side the Axis partners. Japan wanted to take her pick of the Dutch and British colonies without military confrontation with America. They also felt t the colonial masters were powerless to defend their overseas territories. They planned to seize the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Sian and Burma and thereafter established a strong defensive perimeter around her newly acquired possessions. It was only the fear of the combined strength of the United States and the British navies that prevented Japan from invading the colonies then.

g. **Colonial Activities of Western Powers.** Prior to 1940, British, Holland and France seized colonies in the far East without any uproar from neither neighbouring countries nor other Western countries. Japan therefore felt that she would go away with the occupation of the colonies in South East Asia.

h. **Need to Liberate Colonized Asia Countries.** Japan felt

that their Asia brothers were under bondage and desired to check the colonial activities of Western Imperialist. They were sure the colonies in Asia would welcome being saved by the Japanese liberating armies. Though they expected that some dissidents might oppose the liberation efforts of Japan, they believed such dissidents can easily be removed.

i. **Neutrality Treaty with Asia.** In 1941 Japan entered a neutrality pact with Soviet Russia that promised to release Japanese forces for southerly by expansion. This treaty made more forces available to Japan for conquest operation.

### **IMMEDIATE CAUSES**

13. The following are the event s leading to the Burma Campaign:

a. **Japanese Occupation of Indo-China.** Following Hitler's conquest of French in 1940, Japan took advantage of the French elplessness by coercing her to agree to Japanese protective occupation of French Indo-China.

b. **Trade Embargo.** President Roosevelt reacted by demanding on 14 July 41 the immediate withdrawal of Japanese troops from Indo-China. He went on to issue an order freezing all Japanese assets in the United States of America and placed a trade embargo on all war materials and steel importation to Japan. England and the refugee Dutch government in London took similar measures. Japan was thus deprived of her vital steel and oil supplies. It was speculated that the paralyzing ember go would force Japan to fight to seize the unprotected colonies of the European powers as the only alternative to

collapse or abandon her policy.

c. **Negotiations.** Japan negotiated with the USA for four months to lift the embargo but the later refused. America insisted that Japan withdraw her troops not only from Indo-China but also from China before the embargo could be lifted this condition was not acceptable to the Japanese government.

d. **Attack on Pearl Harbour.** Japan sought powerful means to settle the problem with failure of negotiations. Her plans were to invade all the colonies of the Western powers. She played for time to strike and catch their adversaries, particularly the USA unawares. The USA was however aware of the Japanese plan having broken a coded system of communication between Japanese Ambassador and her home government. All the same, Japan successfully attacked Pearl Barbour on 10 Dec 41. This action infuriated America who declared war against Japan.

e. **The Invasion of Other South East Asian Countries and Burma.** After bombing Pearl Harbour, Malaya, Hong Kong, the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies fell under the Japanese war machine. Burma was subsequently invaded on 8 January 1942. The allies led by Britain had no choice than to come to the defence of the colony. This was the final straw that led to the Burma campaign.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE INVASION AND ALLIED RETREAT** **(8 JAN TO MAR 42)**

#### **SITUATION**

1. It has been mention that following the conquest of the South West Pacific, Japan planned to invade Burma. The Allied were in complete disarray in South East Asia as Singapore, Malaya, Hong Kong, the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies had fallen. Burma had been tossed from one military command to another from being under the Indian Government to British Chiefs of Staff to Southwest Pacific command and then back to India. Consequently, no serious preparations were made to defend Burma against the Japanese expected invasion.

#### **FORCES USED**

2. **Allies.** The Allies used the following forces:
  - a. 17 Indian Division (trained and equipped for desert warfare).
  - b. 1 Burma Division (untried in war).
  - c. 7 Armored Brigade (brought in later as reinforcement).
  - d. Element of British and American Air Force.
  - e. Chinese 1 Army 22 Division, 96 Division and 26 Division (brought in March 42).
  
3. **Japanese.** Japanese 15 Army made up of 33 and 55 Division.

## **PLAN**

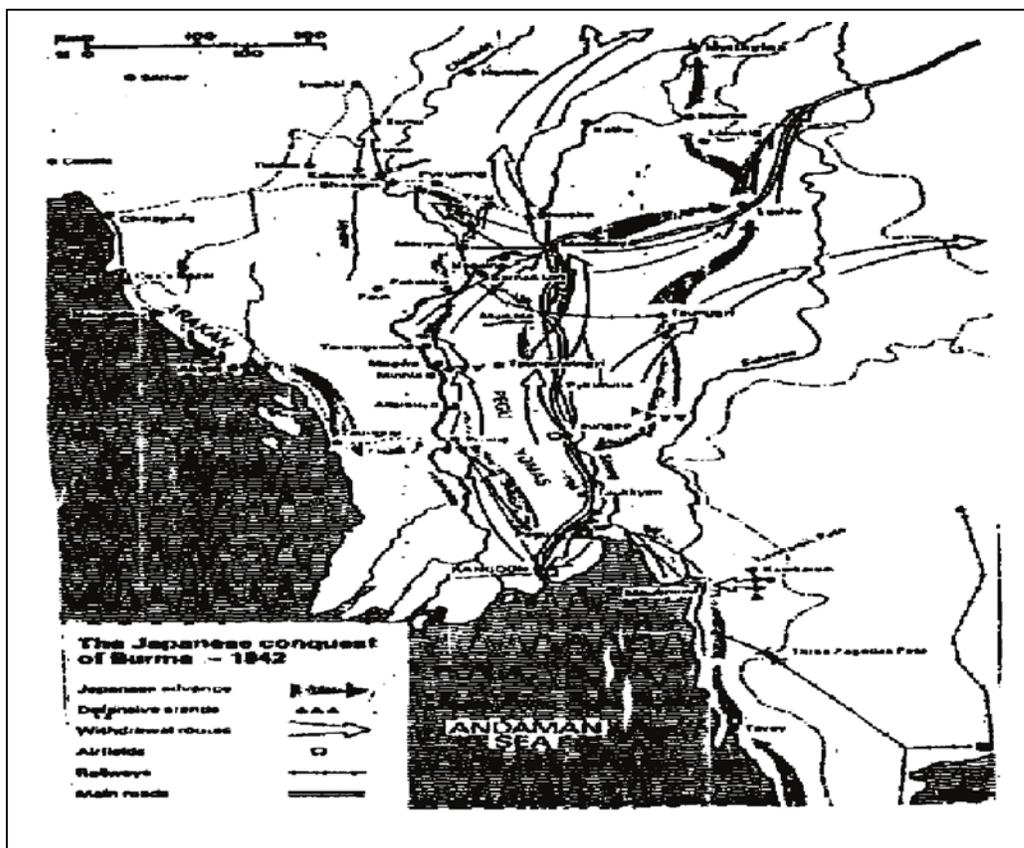
4. **Japan.** The 2 Divisions were to invade Burma through Siam. It was to be a two pronged simultaneous attack from the Kaw Kareik Pass and through the Tenasserim on to Moulmein.

5. **Allies.** The two divisions (17 Indian and 1 Burma) were deployed over a large area in the Shan States to defend the rail line from Rangoon to Mandalay. The Tenasserim was also held with small garrison throughout its 400 miles length.

## **CONDUCT**

6. On 8 Jan, 42, the Japanese 15 Army invaded Burma through the Kaw Kareik Pass breaking through the detachment holding the pass. The small garrisons in Tenasserim were also attacked by air and land, seizing the air base at Victoria Point (the Southern Most tip). The defenders were evacuated by sea. The Japanese then advanced northwards, to drive out the troops holding Moulmein and captured the town. The two Divisions withdrew across the Salween River and fell back to the Sittang River.

**FIGURE 3: JAPANESE INVASION OF BURMA AND ALLIED RETREAT**



7. **Battle of the Sittang River.** The Japanese forces crossed River Salween enveloping the left flank forcing 17 Indian Division to withdraw to the six hundred yard wide Sittang River in a running battle. Disaster befell 17 Indian Division on 22 and 23 Feb 42. The Division retreating by the jungle tracks to the river and found that the Japanese forces moving around the flank had cut in between the leading brigade, now across the river, and the remainder of the division. The two brigade still on the east bank of the river Sittang fought gallantly to breakthrough to the great railway bridge held by their comrades. At this point the division commander was told that

the small bridgehead on the east bank could hold out no longer, that the Japanese were almost on the bridge itself. He had to decide whether to risk the bridge falling intact into enemy's hands, when they could sweep on to Rangoon or to blow it up, leaving a large part of his forces cut off on the other side. He gave the order to blow the bridge, and the bridge was destroyed, thus cutting off almost 2/3 of his division on the east bank of the river. Only few of them managed to cross the river by swimming and improvised rafts. Majority of them drowned.

8. **The Fall of Rangoon.** The Japanese entered Rangoon from the West having come from East, using paths through the hills and jungle in a swoop on the city. With a strong roadblock on the Prome road, the British force was bottled up. However, as soon as the main body of the Japanese had crossed to the west, the roadblock was removed. Thus Rangoon fell on Mar43 and the British forces withdrew intact through the north, narrowly escaping the clutches of the Japanese.

9. **The arrival of the Chinese.** Early in January, the Chinese Army took over the Mekong River sector from 1 Burma Division in the Yunnan Province. The Chinese Army came in March after moving into the Sittang Valley front. The 6 army remained in reserve apart from the 38 Division under General Sim Li-jen whose troops fought on more than one occasion. Generally, the Chinese played a significant role in the Sittang battle as well as in the retreat. Only that it took some time to get the Chinese convinced to get involved. An attempt was made to stabilize the defensive line from Prome to Toungo with the British Burma Corps under Major General Williams Slim holding the right flank in the Irrawaddy valley, the Chinese 5

Army in the central axis while the 6 Army held the flank.

10. **Japanese Final Offensive.** The Japanese renewed their offensive by the last week of March. Attempts to trap the Chinese 5 Army failed and so the Japanese continued their main efforts against the Chinese 6 Army holding the left flank. The 67 Army collapsed and the Allies left was in danger. After more pressure from the Japanese, followed by a last desperate battle at Kaalewa, Gen Slim got his remaining 17 Division troops across the Chindwin River in a retreat to Imphal in India on 17 May. The way (700 miles between Burma and India) lay through thick jungle and a great barrier of mountains.

11. **Final Outcome.** The withdrawal from Rangoon to Imphal covering 900 miles in four months was the British Army's longest retreat ever. The British suffered 30,000 casualties among the 42,000 involved. Out of the 95,000 Chinese troops involved, only a Division withdrew as a fighting unit. The Japanese suffered only 4,500 casualties. 1 Burma Division and 17 Indian Division were skeletons of their former selves.

12. **Reasons for the Defeat.** There are several reasons for the Allied initial defeat. The reasons included poor preparation, execution, strategy and tactics:

- a. **Lack of Preparation.** Until few weeks before it happened, no higher authority, civil or military, had expected an invasion of Burma. Thus, Burma was defended with forces too small and unsuitable to hold on for long against the Japanese. What were available were two ill-equipped and inexperienced divisions. One of these was trained and equipped for desert warfare while the second

contained a large proportion of raw and unreliable Burmese troops. These forces were insufficient to meet superior Japanese troops in a country the size and topography of Burma.

b. **Lack of Clear Aim.** Selection and maintenance of the aim is one of the key principles of war. While the Japanese Army had the sole aiming of invading and overrunning Burma, the British had no directive as to what was their overall aim in Burma. Consequently, they could not decide whether to hold part of Burma or to destroy the Japanese in one bold gambler or to withdraw slowly to India in order to keep their forces intact while the defence of India was being prepared. This lapse obviously weakened the ability of field commanders to act decisively when confronted with critical situation.

c. **Poor Training.** The Japanese used formations specially trained and equipped for jungle warfare but the Allied used formations trained and equipped for the desert. Allied troops therefore looked at the Burma jungle as impenetrable and as an obstacle to movement and vision and relied only on road transport. The Allied forces were thus always strung out along the few roads and became vulnerable to attack both from the air and ground. The Japanese on the other hand exploited the jungle as a means of concealed movement and surprise.

d. **Inferior Tactics.** Tactically, the Japanese outclassed the Allied forces. The main tactics the Japanese successfully used against the Allied was the hook and road block. These were carried out by the Japanese establishing a roadblock in strength on the Allied forces.

e. **Leadership.** The leadership of the Allied had much to be desired. They had the rather nebulous idea of retaining territory

which led to the initial dispersion of her forces over wide areas, an error which they continued to commit and worse still it led to a defensive attitude. In contrast, the Japanese leadership was confident, bold and so aggressive that never for one day did they lose the initiative.

f. **Poor Intelligence.** The Allied forces had no warning of the enemy's movement and attacks. They also had no information on their strength, disposition, equipment, plan, morale etc. There was hardly any Army air reconnaissance and the Burmese were unprepared to divulge information about the Japanese. Information obtained from the dead and documents were scanty because the whole Burma Corps had only one officer who could speak and read Japanese. This often caused delay in translation and renders any information he discovered stale.

g. **Lack of Co-operation.** There was no co-operation between the British forces and the Burmese civilian on one hand, and Gen Stilwell led Chinese Forces and the British on the other. The Burmese civilians were either indifferent or hostile. Consequently, they carried out acts of sabotage, burning of villages and giving information about the British forces to the Japanese. Many Burmese troops also deserted to protect their families from the torture and punishment of the victorious Japanese soldiers. The Chinese were also reluctant to obey their American General. Besides, the co-operation between General Stilwell and the British was weak. The British government officials were also not helpful in offering assistance and sending supplies. They were either suspicious of the

Chinese motive or from the fear of the burden of administrative control or command in managing a large army resulting from the influx of the Chinese into India.

h. **Inadequate Supply Route.** There was no serious attempt made to connect India and Burma by road so that when Rangoon fell the Army in Burma was by all practical purpose isolated.

i. **Lack of Adequate Air Cover.** The inadequate air forces and their total elimination in the campaign was a grievous disadvantage to the Army. The Japanese had complete air superiority thereby. The poor air situation also compounded the problem of logistics, casualty evacuation, reinforcement, etc.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE FIRST ARAKAN CAMPAIGN**

#### **SITUATION**

1. The Japanese had to end their control of Burma as the monsoon season was approaching. Four-fifth of Burma was already in their hands and they have cut off China and now controlled the approaches to the southern resource area of the country.

2. The Allies were fearful and possible Japanese invasion of India after the Monsoon and prepared for defence. General Wavell who was now commanding the Allied Forces in India knew that a counter invasion of Burma was out of the question until late 1943 at the earliest, considering the Allied weakness. However, for training purposes and the need to raise morale of the men by recording success, small scale operation were carefully planned. Wavell chose Arakan, the northwest sea coast of Burma, for the first of these small offensives.

3. The Arakan coast is dominated by the 90 miles-long Mayu Peninsula. It is divided by a range 1500 feet high with low tidal creeks dissecting the lowlands on both sides of the range. Just south of the Peninsula is the island part of Akyab, which was an important Japanese centre.

4. Meanwhile, General Stilwell was also busy building a Chinese Army, the 22 and 38 Division in India and began constructing roads across the

northern mountains to China.

### **AIM**

5. The aim of the First Arakan Campaign was to clear the Mayu Peninsula and capture Akyab Island.

### **FORCES USED**

6. The Allies 14 Indian Division commanded by Major General WL Lloyd was later replaced by Maj Gen Loma while the Japanese had their 15 Division.

### **PLAN**

7. **Allied Forces.** To advance down on both sides of the peninsula using 14 Division, with a flanking detachment still further east in the Kaladan Valley.

8. **Japanese.** The Japanese defensive plan was as follows:

- a. Defensive positions in Donbaik and Rathedaung.
- b. Positions made up of deep bunkers covered with logs to give protection against shells. These were camouflaged and contain 5 to 20 men each sited in groups to provide mutual support.

### **PREPARATION**

9. **Allies.** The Allies made the following preparations:

- a. Training troops in jungle tactics including patrols.
- b. Reorganization and re-equipping of units and

formations.

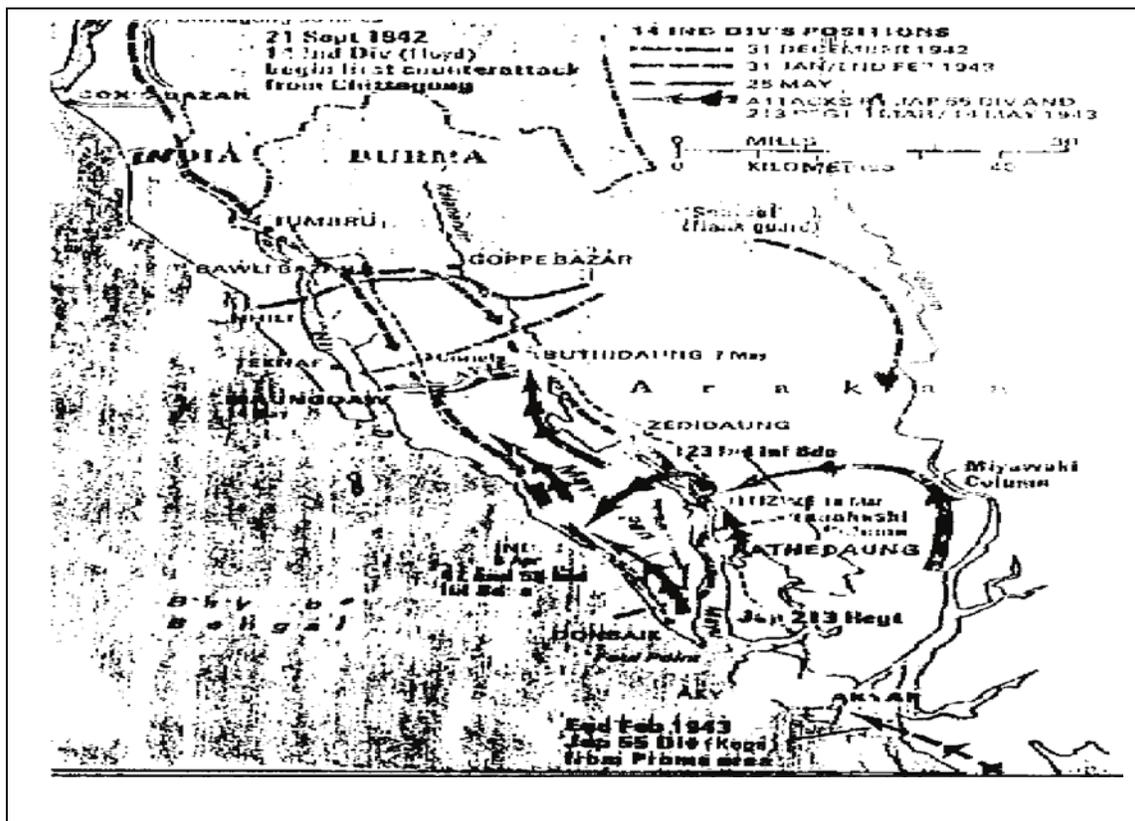
c. Stockpiling of supplies.

10. **Japanese**. Consolidation of their captured grounds and preparation of defences.

### **CONDUCT**

11. The Indian division started their advance into Arakan on both sides of the Mayu Range, along the sea coast and astride the Mayu River. A flanking detachment also advanced further east in the Kaladan Valley. The central spine of the range was not occupied. It was judge too precipitous and too thick a jungle to be passable.

12. The advanced went well initially with the little port of Maungdaw on the estuary of the Naf River and the town of the Buthidaung attacking with little opposition. They also occupied two tunnels linking the two sides of the range. Movement was however slowed down, as the many creeks have to be bridged. It was not until 6 Jan 43 before the advance resumed. This delay enabled the Japanese to bring up reinforcements and to dig in bunkers at Donbaik and Rattthedaung (see map). The bunkers in Dunbaik were manned by a battalion plus who inflicted heavy casualties whenever a frontal attack was launched against them.

**FIGURE 4: FIRST ARAKAN CAMPAIGN**

13. Allied troops would often overrun the bunkers but knowing that they were in the open and unprotected, the Japanese artillery would fire at their own position inflicting injuries and casualties. Several frontal attacks on Donbaik were launched as the flanks were considered impassable. The fourth and final attack was launched using 6 Brigade with 4 Battalions on 18 Mar 1943. They succeeded in overrunning the Japanese position but could not hold it. Like their predecessors the troops of 6 Brigade were caught in the open by the merciless Japanese counter-barrage and bloodily driven back. This was the last effort but Dunbaik remained impregnable and all

hope of taking it was abandoned.

14. Having brought the Allied advanced to a stand still, the Japanese counter attacked. First the flank detachment in the Kaladan Valley was attacked and scattered. Col Tanahashi broke into the Mayu Range regarded by the Allies as impenetrable, and struck behind 55 Brigade opposite Rathedaung. After a fierce fighting the brigade extricated itself and badly shaken, fell back.

15. At this stage the Allies' position was interspersed with the Japanese forces that were every where. The Allies still managed to regroup their forces and with reinforcement, launched and attacked on enemy's positions along the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road but the counter attack was again repulsed. On 11 May the Allied forces commenced pulling back to where they started. Almost exactly six months after the commencement of the opposition. The first Arakan thus ended where it took off with the Japanese still occupying Arakan.

### **CONSEQUENCES**

16. **Casualties.** The Allies lost about 2500 killed, wounded or missing in action. A great deal of equipment was also lost. The Japanese losses were lighter.

17. **Morale.** The morale of the Indians and British troops declined further with the defeat.

18. **Inferiority Complex.** The myth of the Japanese soldiers as

superhuman was reinforced.

### **REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF THE CAMPAIGN**

19. The first Arakan Campaign failed due to the following reasons:
- a. **Lack of Adequate Appreciation.** The offensive was too ambitious for the state of training and the morale of the forces used. This portrays poor appreciations on the part of the Allied High Command.
  - b. **Poor Strategy.** The British used 9 brigades for the offensive. The terrain did not favour the employment of such a large force. Thus their numerical superiority was ineffective.
  - c. **Command and Control.** 14 Division had as much as 9 brigades, which were too much for a division to control. If such a large number of brigades were necessary, perhaps 2 divisions could have been used with the corps commander exercising full operational control of the operation.
  - d. **Bad Tactics.** The British troops still regarded the jungle as impenetrable. The Japanese on the other hand came over the Mayu Ranges through the jungle and over the perspicuous slopes avoided by the Allies as being impassable. The failure to put forces on the crest of the range was based on this premise.
  - e. **High Vulnerability to Tropical Diseases.** The element of vegetable conditions of Burma made it conducive for rector insects. Hence the incidence of malaria, typhoid fever and other tropical diseases were high, the introduction of mepercrine and DDT limited the courage of malaria and typhoid on the British troops.

f. **Poor Mobility.** The Japanese traveled very light hence easily pass through the jungle whenever necessary. The Allied forces were still dependent on motor transport and hardly venture into the jungle.

g. **Declining Moral.** Prior to the Arakan Campaign, the morale of the Allied troops was on the rise as they successfully penetrated into the Japanese territory using small patrols. However, the disruption of assault and shortage of air power caused the original plans of the Allies to be abandoned. Further more, the crop failure of 1943 due to the early monsoon resulted to excessive hoarding of grains. All these adversely affected the morale of the troops.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **WINGATE FIRST MISSION OR THE FIRST CHINDIT OPERATION**

#### **SITUATION**

1. The British forces were bitter, disillusion and frustrated with very low morale as a result of their crushing defeat by the Japanese in Arakan. It was at this period that Brigadier Wingate came into limelight. At the same time that General Wavel initiated the first Arakan Campaign, he also gave permission for a second operation, Wingate first Chindit to boost Allied morale. Brigadier Orde Wingate, a royal artillery officer was invited to India so that the 40 years old officer could play a successful role in guerilla operation against the Japanese. He had carried out similar operation in Ethiopia when the Italians had been defeated by a comparable small force of British and Indian troops. He therefore gave his express permission to Wingate to demonstrate his concept of Long-Range penetration (LRP). He was given a brigade to train for his operation.

#### **FORCES INVOLVED**

2. Wingate was allocated the 77 infantry Brigade for the operation.

#### **AIM**

3. The aim of this Chindit was to:

- a. Cut off the Myikyina-Mondalay railway and bridges.
- b. Harass the enemy in Shwebo area.
- c. cross the Irrawaddy if possible and cut the Mandalay-Lashio rail line.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS**

4. The first Chindit as a military operation was an expensive failure. About 1,000 men a third of the total involved were lost. It gave little tangible returned for the losses it had suffered and the resources absorbed. The damage it did Japanese communications was repaired in few days and casualties inflicted on the Japanese had no immediate effect on their dispositions of their plans. Nevertheless, the operation was beneficial in the following ways:

- a. **Better Knowledge of the Enemy.** The Allied learnt something of the Japanese psychology. It was discovered that the Japanese were very methodical, with predictable reactions to given situations.
- b. **Boost in Morale.** The greatest benefit of the Chindit was its propaganda value and above all was invaluable in lifting the morale of soldiers. The British and Indian troops in the Chindit had beaten them behind the Japanese at their own game.

They had demonstrated their ability to raid of behind the Japanese lines. Thus, the raids offset the dampening outcome of the Arakan Campaign. For this reasons alone, Wingates operation was worth all the hardship and sacrifices his men endured.



## **THE SECOND ARAKAN CAMPAIGN**

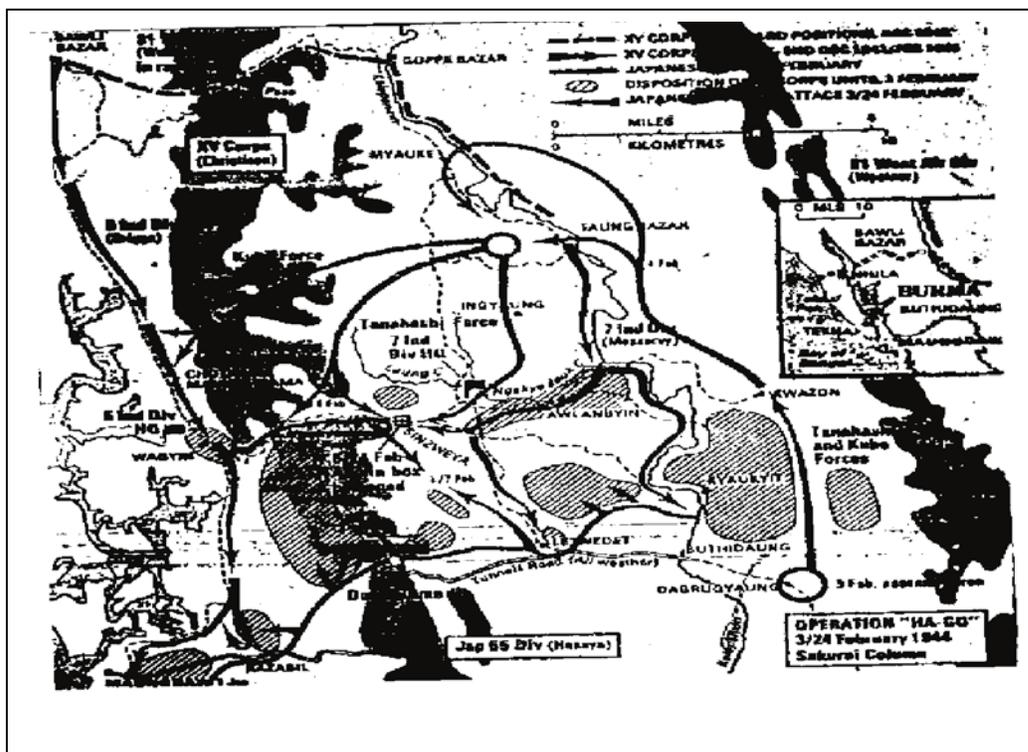
### **SITUATION**

1. In the second half of 1943, there was sweeping changes in the Allied command structure. The British and United State Governments formed a South-East Asia Command (SEAC) in August 1943 under the command of Lord Mountbatten with his headquarters in India and later Ceylon. Also formed was the 14 Army out of the old Eastern Army India. Gen Slim was appointed Commander of the new Army as well as the deputy to Lord Mountbatten.
2. Lord Mountbatten under the direction of the Combined Chief of Staff of the British and USA projected the following operations in the South-East Asia for 1944:
  - a. An overland advance of 15 Corps in Arakan.
  - b. The advance of Stilwell's Chinese Forces on Myitkyina.
  - c. A long-range penetration operation by Wingate's forces to help Stilwell.
  - d. An advance on the main front in Assam by 4 Corps Eastern Chinw in.
3. The Arakan operation was mounted first, though the planning for the four operations went on concurrently.
4. The Japanese initial posture was to establish a strong defensive

perimeter around the newly acquired Asia territories. They however changed their posture when their defences were easily pierced during the first Chindit. The Japanese high Command in Burma was consequently directed to plan for an attack against the Allied forces in the Imphal front. In case the Allied struck first, they were to be held, defeated then thrown back before the projected advance on Imphal. The code word for their operation was HA-GO.

### **FORCES USED**

5. Allied used 15 Corps commanded by Lt Gen Sir Philip Christon. Under his command were the following formations:
  - a. 5 Indian Division commanded by Maj Gen HR Briggs.
  - b. 7 Indian Division Commanded by Maj Gen Sir Frank Messervy.
  - c. 81 West African Division commanded by Gen CN Woolner.
  - d. 26 Division (Corps service) commanded by Maj Gen CEN Lomax.

**FIGURE 6: SECOND ARAKAN CAMPAIGN AND OP HA-GO**

6. **Japanese.** The 15 Army commanded by Lt Gen Mutaguchi was involved in the operation. However, only the 55 Division Group commanded by Lt Gen Hanaya was used with Lt Gen Sakurai Tohtoro commanding infantry component of the group. The division was divided into the following striking forces:

- a. 1<sup>st</sup> column 112 Infantry Regiment (4 x battalions) commanded by Col Tanahashi.
- b. 2<sup>nd</sup> column ( x battalions) commanded by Col Tai Kubo.
- c. 3<sup>rd</sup> column (2 x battalions) commanded by Col Doi 8.
- d. Artillery batteries and an engineer group.

**AIM**

7. The aim of the second Arakan Campaign was to clear the Japanese forces out of Arakan as prelude to capturing Akyab later.

**PLAN**

8. **Allied Plan.** The Allied plan was as follows:
- a. An advance down the Mayu Peninsular on a wide front to be undertaken by 15 Corps.
  - b. The advance on both side of the Mayu Range by 7 Division and seize Bithidaung as their initial objective.
  - c. 5 Division to advance on the range, assault the western end of the Golden Fortress and seize Razabil.
  - d. 81 West African Division to advance down the Kaladan Valley as a flank guard.
  - e. 26 Division in corps reserve.
  - f. Extensive use of air covers.
  - g. Close co-operation between tanks and infantry.
9. **Japanese Plan:**
- a. The aim of the Japanese plan was to carry out a pre-emptive strike against the Allied forces in Burma.



- e. The third force was to mount series of holding attacks along the whole front.
- f. The forces were to set out with only 7 days holding of provisions. Thereafter, they were to live off capture supplies.
- g. British weapons and vehicles are to be captured and used as the operation progress. Extra gun crews to move with the fighting troops in order to man captured guns and vehicles.

### **PREPARATIONS**

10. **Allies.** In preparing for the operations, the Allied Forces did the following:
- a. Intensified training in jungle warfare.
  - b. Improvement of ration supply to the forces.
  - c. Improvement on the stock of arms and ammunitions.
  - d. Combating sickness rate by laying emphasis on the following:
    - (1) Practical application of latest medical research results.
    - (2) Treatment of the sick in forward areas instead of evacuation to India.
    - (3) Air evacuation of serious casualties.
    - (4) The raising of morale through constant visit to units and addressing of the troops.
  - e. Intensification of patrols in order to get individual feeling of superiority and establish the desire to close up with the enemy.
  - f. Launching of minor operations by units and formations against Japanese forward posts.
  - g. Improvement on the state of rest and reinforcement camps.

- h. Movement and redeployment of tactical headquarters of 15 Corps and 14 Army.
  - i. 26 Division which was occupying the Chittagoung area was withdrawn and replaced with 7 Division.
  - j. Arrangements to supply formations by air when cut off.
11. **Japanese.** Preparations made by the Japanese were:
- a. A detachment of 55 Division and Calvary regiment moved to the Kaladan Valley.
  - b. Moving of 54 Division towards Arakan.
  - c. Formation of the Indian National Army and its move close to the Arakan front.
  - d. Gradual build-up of forces from the original 4 divisions (plus) to 8 divisions.

## **CONDUCT**

12. The 15 Corps advance commenced on 30 Nov 43. The 7 Indian Division advanced rapidly southwards pushing through Japanese out-posts and broke through into the Letwedet area. The 5 Indian Division pushed through to the Maungdaw plain facing Razabil. In Dec 43, the Allied forces came up against the Japanese strong defence line from Maungdaw to Razabil down to Letwedet and Buthidaung.

13. Now 7 Division needed vehicles, guns and tanks to attack Letwedet. The best route to do this through the Meyu range was the Ngakyedauk pass. This route which had earlier been secured was now developed into an earth road.

14. **The Administrative Box.** Considering the size of force operating in the Kalapanzin area, there was need to establish an administrative area. The general area of Sinzweya where the Ngakyedauk pass entered the plain was chosen as ideal for the purpose. Located in this area were petrol and ammunition dumps, ration stores, medical supplies, main dressing stations and vehicles. The area became famous as the Administrative Box. Sinzweya was chosen because the area was flat and had a bowl devoid of jungle, scrub and trees. These features, though ideal for an administrative area made it particularly vulnerable, hence a brigade of 5 Division was sent to the place for its defence. Under the Japanese counter attack, the open clearing was a tactical trap. The side of the box was encircled by a rim and covered in jungle, enabling the Japanese to be unseen to the edge of the perimeter. Thus, everyone and everything within the box was under the direct observation and fire of the Japanese.

15. **The Attack on Razabil.** The attack on Razabil was preceded by heavy air bombardment followed by artillery fire. Then the Infantry attacked, closely covered by tanks from the armoured regiment - the 25 Dragoons. However, the Japanese opened fire on the infantry as soon as the tanks ceased fire to allow the infantry to move forward to close up with the defenders. The offensive lasted for about a week with limited success only on the higher grounds. However, the British perfected a technique against the Japanese deep bunkers during the week of fighting. First the tanks fired surface burst high explosive to clear the jungle followed by delay action high explosive to break up the face of the bunkers. Finally, armour-piercing shots were fired as the infantry closed in. Though this method reduced the

defences and battered the defenders badly, few desperate Japanese still held out. Further attacks on the fortress were suspended on the orders of Corps Commander, as the tanks were required in 7 Division's front. 5 Division, therefore, by-passed Razabil and moved ahead to capture Mungaw which was used as a supply port.

16. In the eastern sector, 7 Division had pushed on the sized a hillock overlooking the main lateral road between the tunnels and Buthidaung Japanese counter attacks on the position were successfully repulsed.

17. The West African Division concentrated at Chiringa, 50 miles south of Cittagong, towards the end of 1943 and advanced into the Kaladan Valley. Within a month, they built the 75-mile track called the African way to Daletine on the Kaladan River. Here they built airstrips with an impressive speed.

18. They commenced advancing on 20 Jan 42 along the Valley, brushing aside the Japanese post. Kyauktaw and Apaukwa were subsequently captured early March 1944. The Division's advance on the Japanese flank posed great threats to their main force in Arakan. Consequently, the enemy concentrated a superior force of about 4 battalions under Col Kubo against the division. They were easily pushed to the north of Kwauktaw due to their dispersed dispositions. The division reorganized in the area of Kaladan Valley. The Japanese followed up and eventually drove the division out of the Kaladan Valley.

### **JAPANESE COUNTER ATTACK**

19. The Japanese counter attack, though anticipated, still came as a surprise. Using local guides, Col Tanahashi's force invaded the forward posts 7 division and burst into Taung Bazar and quickly wiped out the troops stationed there. The force then turned left and move into the rear of 5 Division. They made stiff resistance from 9 Brigade of 5 Division who were sent to reinforce 7 Division. The headquarters of 7 Division was attacked and they withdrew to the Administrative Box after a fierce dogfight. Tanahashi's force pursued them and mounted several assaults on the Box.

20. Meanwhile Col Kubo's force pushed north towards Goppe Bazar and dropping a detachment to close the road southwards, turned west to cross the Mayu Range. The Japanese crossed the trackless precipitous range with all their mortars and machine guns and burst out on the main Bwali-Maungdaw Road. They established a road block astride the road, blew bridges on it, fired on camps and repeatedly raided headquarters 15 Corps for the next 48 hours. 15 Division was thus cut off from all access by road for 2 days.

21. Col Doe's force, whose tasks was to carry out series of attacks on the Allied front from the south operated along the Buthidaung-Razabil Road. They pinned down the Allied forward troops, established a road block from on the Ngakyedauk pass, thus linking up with Tanahashi's force. 7 Division was completely surrounded. Doi's force then went ahead to launch a frontal attacks at the Administrative Box while Tanahashi attacked from the rear.

### **ALLIED REACTION**

22. The Allied reacted promptly to the Japanese on-slight. The whole of 7 Division and most of 5, 26 and 81 West African Divisions were placed on

air supply. 26 Division (15 Corps Reserve) crossed the Goppe passed into the Kalapanzin Valley and re-occupied Taung Bazaar and began to press on Tanahashi's rear. The 36 Division was ordered to replace 26 Division in the Bwali area.

23. The 5 Division also thinned out from the west of the Mayu Range and pushed up the Ngakydauk pass towards 7 Division. At the same time hurriedly organized forces from 5 Division and 36 Division (now corpsreserve) attacked from both sides of the road block established by Kubo's force south of Bwali Bazaar.

24. The Allied forces in the Administrative Box repulsed many ferocious attacks by the Japanese in hand combat. No soldier, British, Indian or Gurkha, yielded any ground. They fought or died where they stood; as a result, the Japanese were unable to overrun the Box. All efforts made by the Japanese to reinforce and replenish their forces were futile as their column were ambushed in the jungle by patrols sent out by defenders of the Box. Thus the Japanese were unable to maintain the pressure against the Administrative Box. They made one last desperate effort on 25 March by infiltrating 400 men into the Administrative Box but were quickly liquidated by troops in reserve located within the Box.

25. The Japanese had failed to destroy the Allied 5 and 7 Division. On the contrary, their forces were facing starvation. In order to exploit the desperate position of the Japanese, 36 Division commenced their advance southwards, mopping up all Japanese forces west of Mayu Range. Similarly, 26 Division pushed down from Taung Bazaar. Completely

deprived of air support and unable to capture any supplies, the Japanese had virtually nothing to fight with. They attempted to pull out but it was too late.

26. The 5 Division returned to Razabil's Fortress. The Japanese positions were pounded out of recognition, rushed and all the last defenders were bayoneted. All other remaining pockets of Japanese resistance along the Maungdaw-Buthidaung Road including the Tunnel Fortress were similarly cleared.

### **RE-ORGANISATION**

27. The end of the second Arakan Campaign coincided with the beginning of the monsoon. For more, Japanese offensive on the main Asaam front had developed. Consequently, there was need to reduce troops in the Arakan area. 15 Corps therefore pulled back its forward troops from Buthidaung which was unhealthy during the monsoon and also difficult to hold. In May 44 the Allies were holding offences only on the Taung Bazaar, the high ground west of Buthidaung the tunnels area, Maungdaw and the mouth of River Naf by which Maungdaw could be approached.

### **FINAL OUTCOME**

28. The Second Arakan Campaign that was the first Allied victory, started off as operation Ha-Go with high hopes for the Japanese. Out of the 8,000 men selected by the Sakurai, fewer than 3,000 escaped through the jungle. Though 15 Corps had lost about 3,506 men, it was the first time the Japanese jungle tactics had been successfully countered. The defeat was a turning point in the Burma Campaigns. The legends of the Japanese soldiers as invisible was smashed and its consequence was that the morale of the 14

Army rose remarkably. The Allied troops began to feel individual superiority over the Japanese.

### **ALLIED ACHIEVEMENTS**

29. The Allies achieved the following in the second Arakan Campaign:
- a. A greater part of Arakan was recaptured.
  - b. For the first time a British Force had met, held and defeated a major Japanese attack.
  - c. The legend of the Japanese as invisible was laid to rest.
  - d. The Allied Force was able to drive the Japanese Air Force out of the sky.
  - e. Air supply method were perfected and exploited.
  - f. Techniques for attacking the Japanese deep bunkers were also developed and improved upon.
  - g. Above all the morale of the Allied troops soared after the campaign.
  - h. The concept of land-air method of combat was demonstrated.

### **REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF THE JAPANESE**

30. The following are identified as the reasons for the failure of the Japanese:
- a. The Japanese were too ambitious in their plan.
  - b. Contrary to expectation, the Allied Forces did not withdraw when surrounded.
  - c. Inadequate arrangements were made for logistics support.
  - d. The Allied had reserve ready to move into hard-pressed areas.

- e. The American tanks were match against the Japanese 70mm shells and howitzer guns.
- f. The Allied supplies were always replenished by air.
- g. The newly arrived spitfires swept the Japanese aircraft from the sky.
- h. Soldiers of the Indian National Army fighting with the Japanese panicked in battle and deserted their columns.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **STILWELL CHINESE OPERATION IN NORTHERN BURMA AND THE SECOND CHINDIT'S OPERATION**

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. On 14 October 1943 the headquarters of the Chinese Army in Burma was formed with 22 and 38 Chinese Division under command. The Army was supported by one provisional tank Group and American led levies-the Kachin Raiders. Gen Stilwell was the commander of the Army.
2. The Anglo American Combine Chiefs of Staff had authorized Admiral Mountbatten to construct the Ledo Road to China in order to maintain the Chinese Army in Northern Burma. This road was to replace the old Burma road running from Mandalay to China. Gen Stilwell was therefore ordered to occupy Northern Burma up to the Mogaung-Myikyina area to cover the building of the Ledo road. Wingate's special force was to be used to assist Stilwell by cutting the line of communication of the Japanese division facing Stilwell.

#### **AIM**

3. The aim of Stilwell's operation was to occupy Northern Burma to the Mogaung-Myityina area. The Chindit were to assist Stilwell.

#### **FORCES USED**

4. **Allied Forces :**

a. Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) Commanded by Gen Stilwell:

- (1) 22 Chinese Division Commanded by Gen Liao.
- (2) 38 Chinese Commanded by Lt Gen LI Jen Sun.
- (3) American Long- Range Penetration Regiment (Merrill's Marauders).
- (4). Chinese Tank Group.
- (5). A battalion of Burma Rifles and the Kachin Levies.
- (6). American Northern Air Sector Force in support.

**Wingate's Force**

- (1) 16 Brigade.
- (2) 77 Brigade.
- (3) 111 Brigade.
- (4) 3 West African Brigade.
- (5) 14 Brigade.
- (6) 23 Brigade.
- (7) 1 Air Commando

5. **Japanese Force.** The main Japanese force facing the Allies was their 18 Division.

**PLAN**

6. **Allied Plan.** The Allied plan was as follows:

- a. Stilwell's Chinese to advance from Ledo through Shingwigang in the Hukawng Valley on Thipha ga and on to Mogaung and Myitkyina.
  - b. The Merrill's Marauders were to operate on the flanks of the advancing force.
  - c. Wingate's Chindits were to move into 4 assembly places:
    - (1) 16 Brigade-Aberdeen, 27 miles Northwest of India.
    - (2) 77 Brigade-Broadway/Piccadilly, 35 miles East-North and 40 miles North-East of India respectively.
    - (3) 111 Brigade-Chowringee, 35 miles East of India.
  - d. The first of 16 Brigade was to march to Aberdeen as advance party while the second half of the Brigade and the two other brigade were to be flown in to their respective assembly areas.
  - e. Wingate mission was to:
    - (1) Fly into isolated areas behind Japanese positions at Mogaung and Myitkyina.
    - (2) Establish airfields and stronghold as forward bases.
    - (3) Operating from strongholds cut the communications of the Japanese 18 Division, harassing its area and preventing its reinforcement.
    - (4) Inflict the greatest possible damage and confusion on the Japanese in North Burma.
    - (5) Create a favourable situation for the Yunnan Chinese Forces to cross the Salween River and enter Burma.
7. **Japanese Plan/Disposition.** The disposition of the Japanese forces was as follows:

- a. Headquarters, 114 Regiment of 18 Division in Myitkyina.
- b. Two Regiment deployed in depth at the head of the Hukawng Valley with detachments forwards. They were to check the Chinese advance southwards.
- c. One Regiment in reserve.

### **PREPARATIONS**

8. The following preparations were made by the Allies for the operation:
  - a. Special training for the Chindit and the Merrill's Marauders.
  - b. Marrying up of men and aircraft.
  - c. Loading and preparation of aircraft.
  - d. Continuous reconnaissance over Mandalay to convince the Japanese that any airborne operation would be directed against that area.

### **CONDUCT**

9. Preliminary Operation. These were two preliminary operations heralding Stilwell's advance and the flying in of the Chindits. The first was the movement of the first wave of 16 Brigade which commenced on 8 Feb 43 from Ledo. They pushed steadily southwards, supplied by air through extremely difficult terrain and crossed the Chindwin, raided and captured Lonkin without any opposition except a Japanese led Burmese patrol. They covered 400 miles and eventually established a strong hold at Aberdeen, some 20 miles from Rangoon-Myitkyina railway which was the main supply route of the Japanese Army. The march took six weeks. The second operation was the diversionary air strikes launching continuously against

Japanese airfields and communications centres to keep their air forces occupied.

### **NCAC (Stilwell Chinese) ADVANCE**

10. The Chinese advance was three pronged. The main body 22 and 38 Divisions advanced down the Hukawng Valley on 15 Oct 43 with the American tank Regiment leading. The Merrill Marauders advanced east, on the flank of the main body, while the Burma Regiment (the Kachins) advanced southwards from fort hertz. The main body fought their way into Walawbum and captured the town on 7 Mar 44. They continued their advance and entered the Mogaung valley on 9 Mar 44. The Japanese 8 Division stoutly resisted manouvres within the valley. The efforts of the NCAC in the valley culminated into the capture of Kamaing by 22 Division on 6 Jun 44. Mogaung fell on 20 Jun 44 after being stormed by 77 Brigade just ahead of 38 Chinese Division.

11. Meanwhile, the Burma Regiment advanced southwards from Fort Hertz and captured Sumprabum and moved on to occupy Tangzup. At the same time the Marauders in the east flank succeeded in establishing a roadblock in Walabum area. The Japanese withdrew to the south after making furious efforts to dislodge the roadblock.

12. **Drive Against Myitkyina.** Myitkyina was the headquarters location of the Japanese 18 Division. It has a functional airfield and well connected with roads and railway. Though it was not a primary objective of the NCAC, Stilwell decided to capture it. He therefore formed a strike force

of about 3 mixed brigades from the Marauders. The strike force set out on 28 April 44 on a wide flanking movement towards Myitkyina. The hazardous march covered nearly 90 miles through the wildest country, passing through thick jungle and precipitous mountains. Brushing aside minor opposition, they captured Myitkyina airfield. Reinforcement was flown in immediately and an attack was launched against the town but the inexperienced Chinese troops could not penetrate the defences of the few of the Japanese defenders. Before Stilwell's forces could be organized in order to launch another attack, the Japanese had sent in more troops to the town and held it in strength. Despite additional Chinese reinforcement to the Marauders and repeated attacks, the town could not be captured. It eventually settled down to an uninspired, ill-directed siege. The town held on for 79 days and was finally captured by a combined Allied Forces on 3 Aug 44. The Marauders who started the battle were no more part of the force that eventually captured Myitkyina.

### **OPERATION OF THE CHINDIT**

13. The fly-in of the Chindits started on 5 Mar 44, taking off from Llaghat airfield. The main force was flown by gliders and later by transport aircraft. Due to last minutes changes, the Brigades (77 and 111) were airlifted to Broadway and Chowringgee. The activities of the various brigades are briefly described in succeeding paragraphs.

14. **16 Brigade.** The column of 16 Brigade after their rough march and establishment of the stronghold at Aberdeen, roamed the area fighting minor engagements with the Japanese. Their last operation was the

unsuccessful attempt to capture Rail India in conjunction with 14 Brigade. They were unable to dislodge the well dug-in Japanese with artillery. 16 Brigade were so exhausted by their march and this final absorptive effort that they have to be flown out.

15. **77 Brigade.** 77 Brigade under the command of Brigadier General Calvin was flown into Broadway after some harrowing accident during the fly-in. On 6 Mar 44, the brigade attack on enemy garrison near Mawlu along the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway and defended the Japanese after a fierce battle and established the White City stronghold. They also cut the road south of Bhomo. The White City stronghold was preventing the Japanese from sending supplies to the Japanese 81 Division fighting Stilwell. The Brigade on 20 Jun 44 captured Mogaung after a furious battle. They withstood several attacks mounted against the stronghold but eventually moved out and went on to establish another stronghold at Blackpool. The brigade held Black pool against persistent Japanese attacks. When the pressure became too much and bad weather made re-supply by air difficult, the brigade broke out, moved north to India lake where their casualties were flown out using a Sunderland flying boat (sea plane).

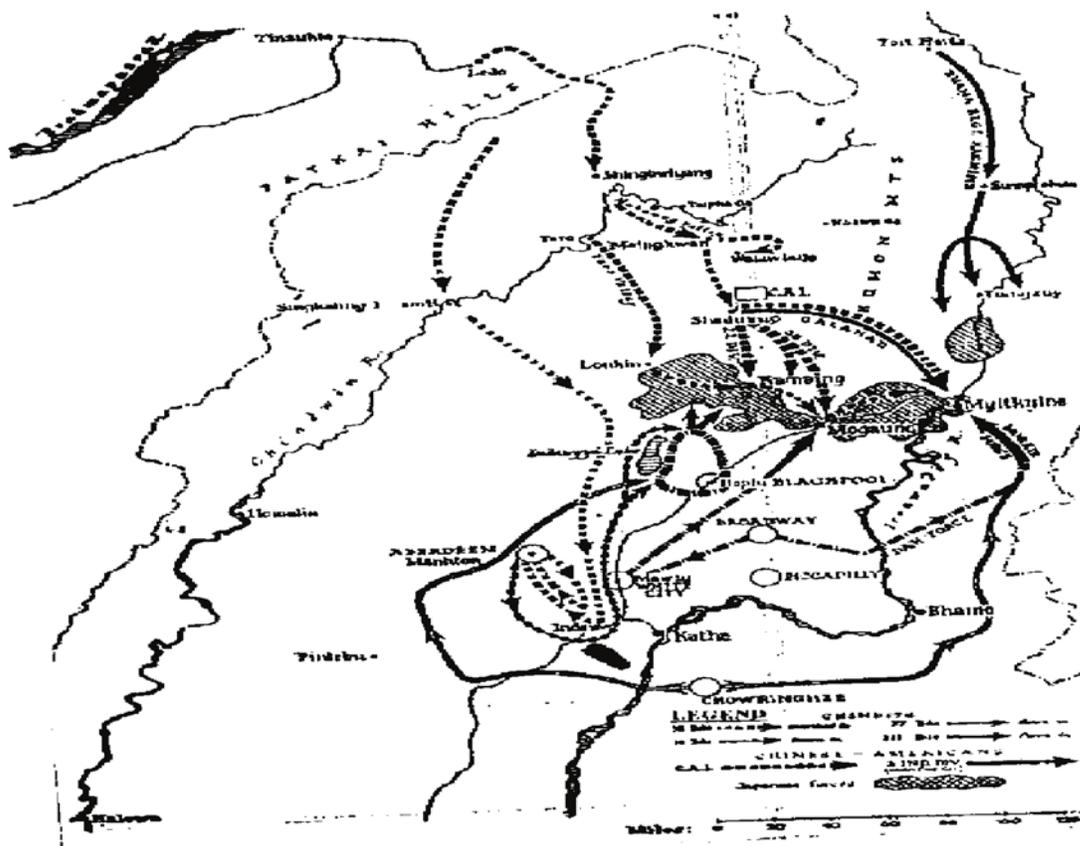
16. **111 Brigade.** The 111 Brigade was commanded by Brig Gen WDA Lentaigne landed at Broadway and Chowringhee. The widely separated columns were united and they moved to the west of Indaw. Some of the columns were ambushed while others ran into trouble with the Japanese. Many of the columns were defeated in detail. However they successfully carried out raids and ambushes against the Japanese including the cutting of the Bhamo-Myitkyina road.

17. **14 Brigade and 3 West African Brigade.** The 14 Brigade and 3 West African Brigade were initially in reserve. They were flown into Aberdeen on 22 Mar 44. The 3 West African Brigade split into battalions and garrisoned various strongholds. The 14 Brigade supported 16 Brigade in the attempt of the latter to capture Rail Indaw.

### **JAPANESE REACTION**

18. The Japanese were surprised by the Chindits and took one week to fully assess the situation. Their first reason was to launch air attacks on Chowringhee and Broadway on 10 and 13 Mar 44 respectively. Both were contained by the Chindits with the Japanese losing half the aircraft. However, when White City stronghold was fully established and the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway cut, it became obvious to the Japanese that the raids are more serious than they had earlier thought. Consequently, a special force known as Take Force was tasked to conduct all operations against the Chindits. The persistent attacks against the White City and Blackpool strongholds resulted to the falling of the stronghold.

**FIGURE 8: SECOND CHINDIT OPERATION AND STILWELL'S ADVANCE FROM THE NORTH**



**FURTHER OPERATIONS OF THE CHINDIT**

19. The capture of Mogaung by 77 Brigade was the climax of the Chindits operations. By this time most of the brigades were weary, and depleted in numbers and looks like scarecrows. With the exception of 14 Brigade and 3 West African Brigade who remained with Stilweel, the rest of the Brigade were withdrawn west.

20. 4 Brigade therefore advanced along the railway line from Monganng to seize Pinbaw but was stopped by the Japanese. All efforts to advance further failed and the British 36 Division replaced the exhausted Chindits. The Chindits were formally disbanded in Jan 45 by Mountbatten. Its battalions were subsequently dispersed to other formations.

### **ACHIEVEMENTS OF STILWELL AND THE CHINDITS**

21. The NCAC under Gen Stilwell successfully executed the task given to them. He succeeded in occupying the Huwanwng and Mogaung valleys including tying the Japanese to 18 and 53 Divisions.

22. The Second Chindits was more successful than the first, however some argued that the same result could have been achieved by a smaller commando-type operations with the help of air supply rather than running the fighting effectiveness of five brigades. There is however no doubt that the Chindits contributed to the defeat of the Japanese by the NCAC forces under Stilwell. The operation also proved that small forces could penetrate Japanese defences. Further, the confidence of the Allied were bolstered by the operation and the confirmed the Allies ability to fight in the jungle as well as the Japanese.

### **LESSON LEARNT**

23. The following lessons were learnt during the operations:

- a. **Concentration of Forces.** Concentration of forces is very essential for any operation to succeed . The Chindits had no heavy

weapons and tanks supporting them. Hence they were driven out of their White City and Black pool strongholds. Similarly, Rail Indaw could not be captured as a result of non-availability of artillery and tank support.

b. **Selection and Maintenance of the Aim.** Wingate, though given a specific task did not stick to the aim of the operation. He changes his directives on many occasions thus unable to focus on a particular aim.

c. **Maintenance of Momentum.** The importance of the principle of maintenance momentum was brought out in the siege of Myitkyina. Stilwell's Chinese could not capture the town for almost 3 months because the momentum could not be maintained after the capture of the Myitkyina airfield. They slacked after the first attempt against the town thus enabling the Japanese to bring in reinforcement to strengthen their defences.

d. **Economy of Effort.** It has already been mentioned that smaller commando units could have achieved the results the Second Chindits produced. The forces used for the Chindits were too large for the role they were to play. This was a violation of the principles of economy of effort.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **IMPHAL AND KOHIMA BATTLES**

#### **BACKGROUND**

1. The Japanese had for long have been planning an invasion of India in an operation with the codeword U-GO. The commander Japanese Burma Area Army command ordered the Japanese 15 Army to start the movement of 3 of its 4 divisions that were to take part in the invasion. The invasion was designed to safeguard the Japanese position in Burma by spoiling the Allied offensive that was clearly being prepared. Their intention was to occupy the Imphal-Kahima plain, which could be used as a jumping off point for an Allied invasion of central Burma. In addition, the Japanese also intended to cut the single railway to Assam in India in order to deprive Stilwell's Chinese force of its being carried over the railway.

2. The Allied 14 Army was also looking for a major battle with the Japanese to wear down the Japanese forces before moving into Burma. Gen Slim therefore considered 3 options:

- a. Anticipate the Japanese advance by crossing the Chinwin River and attacking them in Burma first.
- b. Occupying the River line of the Chindwin with the hope of destroying the Japanese as they crossed the river and having part of their forces in both banks.

- c. Concentrate 4 corps in the Imphal plain and fight a decisive battle on ground of the Allied choosing.
3. Gen Slim chose to fight the Japanese on the Imphal plain. His choice was predicated on the fact the he had always fought the Japanese at their advantage, when they had a good line of communication behind them to ensure regular supplies to their forces and he (Slim) had to do the river crossing, jungle traversing and the mountain crossing. He also considered the air superiority if the Allies and the impossible supply position of the Japanese if they failed to occupy the Imphal plain before the monsoon set in.
4. It is important to remember that 4 Corps was deployed in the Assam front and tasked to prepare for an advance into Burma. In anticipation for an offensive operation, the 3 Division of the corps were developed two forward. 17 Division were on the left in the Palet-Tamu area. The 23 Division was concentrated about Imphal as a striking force.

### **FORCES USED**

5. **Allies.** The Allied forces were involved in the battle:
  - a. 4 Corps commanded by Lt Gen Sir Goeffrey Scoones:
    - (1) 17 Indian Division commanded by Maj Gen DT Cowan.
    - (2) 20 Division commanded by Maj Gen Douglas Gracey.
    - (3) 23 Indian Division commanded by Maj Gen Ouvry Robbers.
  - b. 33 Corps under Lt Gen Montague Stopfort:
    - (1) 2 British Division.
    - (2) 5 Indian Division.

- (3) 7 Indian Division.
- (4) 254 Indian Tank Brigade.
- (5) 221 Group RAF.

6. **Japanese.** The Japanese 15 Army under Mutagushi was responsible for the battle. He had the following forces under him.

- a. 15 Division under Lt Gen Yamauchi.
- b. 3 Division commanded by Lt Gen Sato.
- c. 33 Division commanded by Lt Gen Yanagida.
- d. 1 Division, Indian National Army.
- e. A tank regiment.

## **PLAN**

7. **Allied Plan.** The Allied plan was as follows:

- a. 7 Division was to withdraw from Tiddim to the Imphal plain dropping one Brigade 40 miles to Imphal to block the Japanese.
- b. 20 Division was to withdraw from Kabaw valley, concentrate at Moreh area before moving slowly back to occupy a new main position at Shenam.
- c. 23 Indian Division was to form the corps offensive reserve. 7 Division the Indian parachute Brigade. 254 Indian Tank Brigade was to be part of this mobile reserve.
- d. The Japanese forces were to be allowed to advance to the edge of the Imphal plain and when they are committed in assaults on the Allies prepared positions, would be counter-attacked with the reserve.

8. **Japanese Plan.** Outline below was the Japanese plan for the battle:

- a. One Division was to get behind 17 Division, strike the Tiddam-Imphal road and behind 20 Division on the Tamu Palel road.
- b. Two other Divisions to cross the Chindwin and make for Imphal via Ukhurul.
- c. A regiment (3 battalions) to move to Kohima to cut the main Imphal Dimapur road and therefore the Dimapur base.

### **JAPANESE OFFENSIVE**

9. The Japanese offensive began on 6 Mar 44 with 214 Regiment of the Japanese 33 Division attacked the forward position of 7 Divisions. Two days later the 215 Regiment of 33 Division in and out flanking movement went behind the 7 Division positions and established road block along the road to Imphal. The Regiment attacked and occupied Milestone 109 and threatened the detachment guarding the bridge across River Manipur. On 13 Mar 44, the corps commander ordered 17 Division to withdraw to Imphal. The withdrawal commenced on the 14<sup>th</sup> and lasted until 5th Apr 44. 17 Division with only 2 Brigades (48 and 63) encountered series of fierce engagements and roadblocks along their axis of withdrawal. The reserve Division (23 Division) assisted 7 Division by clearing the road from Imphal using two of its bridges (27 and 49). The withdrawer cost the 7 Division about 1200 casualties.

10. Similarly, Maj Gen Yamamoto used a Regiment of 33 Division with 2 tank battalions and artillery in support attacked the flank of 20 Division on 4 Mar 44. The Division immediately pulled back. Their withdrawer which covered only 50 miles was easier than that of 17 Division. The withdrawer

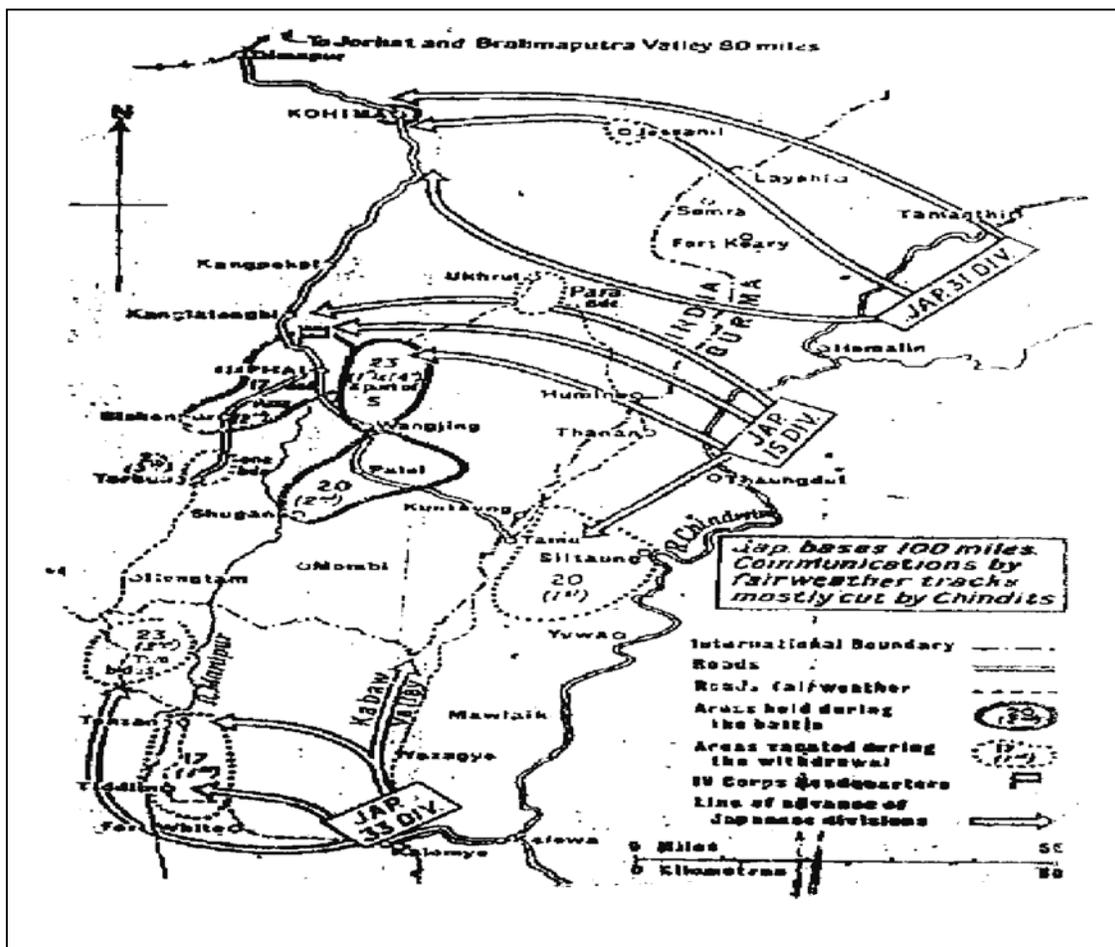
route was less exposed to Japanese infiltration, ambushes and roadblock by the invaders. However, there were several intense engagements especially at Tamu, Tengaupal Ridge, Shenam and Moreh.

### **BATTLE OF KOHIMA**

11. On 5<sup>th</sup> March, 15 and 3 Divisions crossed the Chindwin in force on bamboo rafts, ferry and boats heading for Kohima in an unexpected speed and with great strength. Also, 58 Regiment under Maj Miyazaki was making for Ukhrul-animportant place with its supply dumps set at the confluence of roads. Scoones feared the surge of attack on Ukhrul and ordered 50 parachute Brigade to form a defensive box around the villages of Sanshak and Litton, between Unkhrul and main road an to Kohima was cut off by the Japanese 31 Division on 5 Apr. The garrison was to hold out, being supplied by air while 33 Corps which was to relieve them finished assembling at Dimapur.

12. The main British relieving force, the 33 Corps got a battalion into Kohima but the rest of the bridge was itself surrounded. The Japanese attacked the garrison of 2500 men with 15,000 troops for 16 days and nights. Kohima was closed to collapse bu the few men held their ground depending solely on air supply bu the wounded could not be evacuated. The garrison fought courageously for 50 days including 16 days siege until when 2 Division broke through to relieve them on 20 April 44. Fighting however continued until 14 May 44 when whole the Kohima Ridge was cleared with the help of 7 Indian Division from Arakan.

**FIGURE 9: JAPANESE THRUST ON KOHIMA AND IMPHAL**



**IMPHAL BATTLE**

13. The Japanese first stepped on Indian soil when it's 15 and 33 Division reached Imphal and completely surrounded it thus isolating 4 Corps. The Corps was engaged in a desperate struggle with the Japanese divisions. The original defence perimeter proved too large and even the inner one was penetrated by the Japanese in attacks towards Ningthoukhong, Palel,

Nungashigun and Sengmai. These attacks were only repulsed after some of the most vicious fighting seen in the theater. Both sides found themselves on the edge of starvation, as dropping of supplies was difficult even for the Allies. Additional forces were flown in by Gen Slim throughout the siege to replace Allied losses until their strength in Imphal rose to about 100,000 men.

14. Despite this overwhelming strength, the Japanese continued to fight against very high odds to prevent the relief of Imphal by 2 British Division advancing from Kohima. It was not until 22 Jun 44 that 4 and 33 Corps met at Milestone 107 on the road between the sites of the sieges the longer of which, that of Imphal had lasted 88 days. The British Garrison and their rescuers had made India safe and changed the course of the war in this theatre.

### **COUNTER OFFENSIVE AND PURSUIT**

15. The Japanese 15 Army started to pull back towards River Chindwin. Gen Slim carried out a systematic counter offensive. By mid-July the northern area of the Assam front about Ukhrul was cleared. Similarly, the southern road from Imphal to India was moped up, cleared and by 19 Aug 44, the remnants of the Japanese forces staggered out of India.

16. 2 and 7 Division debauched to reopen the road to Imphal and pursued the stragglers. The pursuit was however slow as the monsoon rains had made the terrain muddy and the jungle, rain-sudden. However, one of the Brigades achieved a march of 100 miles in torrential rain to prepare an ambush against a Japanese column in the Kabaw valley. The British troops

reached the Chindwin at Kalewa by 3 Dec 44. All along the Japanese were harrassed by strategic air action. Though it successfully pulled back, the Japanese 15 Army was ruined.

### **CONSEQUENCES**

17. The Imphal and Kohima battle resulted into the following:
  - a. The Japanese casualties were high 50,000 killed or died and about 25,000 wounded. All their vehicles tanks and guns were lost. Also 17,000 mules perished during the operation. The Allied lost 40,000 killed and wounded.
  - b. Five Japanese Divisions (15, 18, 31, 33 and 55) were destroyed as effective fighting forces.
  - c. The whole Imphal plain and part of central Burma up to the Chindwin River was under Allied hands.
  - d. Many Japanese generals including Mutaguchi and his initial Division commanders Sato, Yanagida and Yamauchi were sacked.

### **REASONS FOR THE JAPANESE FAILURE**

18. The Japanese were defeated in detail in the Imphal and Kohima battles. Below are some reasons for this defeat:
  - a. **Faulty Appreciation.** The Japanese relied much on their previous knowledge of the Allies who often panic when cut off. The old tactics of blocking the rear of the Allies and attacking the position from the front and flank did not work this time. Previously, the Allied when so surrounded either surrender or withdraw to clear their line of communication, thus allowing the Japanese to overrun their

position. This did not happen in the Imphal and Kohima battles. The Allied 4 Corps when cut off stood firm with supplies dropped by air.

b. **Inflexibility.** Flexibility is an important principle of war but the Japanese chose to ignore it. They adhered strictly to their orders whether things are going bad or not. For instance, Maj Gen Sato who was ordered to take Kohima, had ample opportunity to dash Dimapur a more important but undefended town. Instead, he launched repeated attacks against Kohima.

c. **Unfavourable Air Situation.** The Allied Forces had air superiority over the Japanese throughout the battle. This enabled the Allies to send supplies by air to formations cut off and move reinforcements quickly at critical period. The movement of 7 Division from Arakan to Imphal within a short time is a good example.

d. **Extension Line of Communication.** The Japanese line of communication was very long and constantly harassed by the Allied Air Force. Hence supplies and reinforcement hardly reached the fighting troops.

e. **Poor Logistics Plan.** Fighting troops need a sound logistic back up but this was lacking with the Japanese. They carried just enough supplies to last them for some days and hoped to live on captured Allied supplies. Consequently, they faced starvation when the Allied supply base did not fall into their hands.

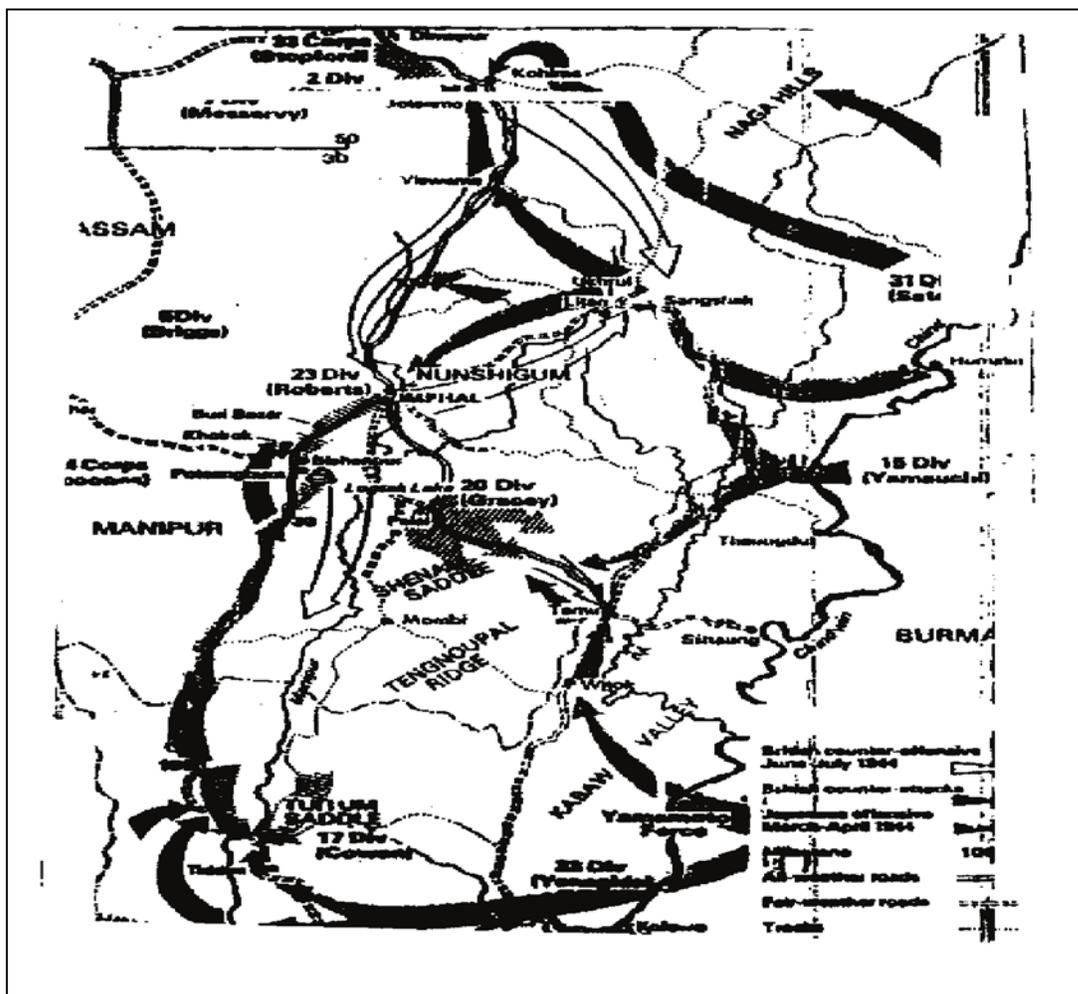
f. **Poor Medical Care.** A large percentage of the Japanese casualties during the battle resulted from diseases such as malaria and typhoid. They had not the drugs, which the Allies had to combat these diseases.

## **LESSONS LEARNT**

19. The hard fought battle of Imphal and Kohima offers instructive lessons to the student of military strategy. Some of these lessons are as follows:

- a. **Importance of Ground.** Ground had been and is always a crucial factor in making an appreciation of any operation. The Allies in their consideration of ground decided to fight the Japanese on the Imphal plain. This was a very wise choice and it paid off in the end. The Japanese line of communication became very long as a result of the difficulty of river crossing (the Chindwin) and the exhaustion arising from their march through the mountain jungle.
- b. **Administration.** The importance of administration as vividly brought out in the battle. While the Allies made adequate arrangements to supply their forces by air, the Japanese made no contingency plans. Their administrative plan was hinged on capturing Allies supplies few days into the operation.

**FIGURE 10: IMPHAL BATTLE**



c. **Air Support.** The domination of the air by the Allied Air Force was the greatest factor that influenced the outcome of the battle. The Allied Air Force had almost complete domination of the air; hence it gave a close support to the land forces, move troops and kept up with air supply. It is therefore always necessary to have air

superiority or at least parity.

d. **Delegation of Responsibility.** In war, the commander is usually held responsible for the failure or success of any operation. He should therefore make all the major decisions. Gen Slim by asking the Commander, 4 Corps to withdraw to the Imphal plain if he noticed that the Japanese anticipated advance had commenced was unwise. He would have given a definite date for the withdrawal having estimated that the Japanese invasion is likely to commence on 5 Mar 44. This lapse nearly caused the destruction of 17 and 20 Division who have to embark on forced withdrawal as against the planned movement back to the Imphal plain.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THIRD ARAKAN CAMPAIGN (THE LIRATION OF ARAKAN)

#### BACKGROUND

1. In the Battle of Imphal and Kohima the Japanese 15 Army were defeated and pursued across the Churchill River. The battle ended just as the monsoon was setting in. As the Japanese were being pursued, planning for the next phase of the Burma Campaign began in earnest at all levels

2. Meanwhile, a new command, Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA) was formed under the command of Lt Gen Sir Oliver Leese. The command was to coordinate the operations of the land Forces in Burma. Gen Stilwell was also replaced by Lt Gen Sultan at NCAC. Similarly, Gen Kinmura, Commander Burma Area Army also reorganized his forces using 33 Army with three strong divisions in Arakan.

3. In July 44 the Allied high command decided that the Allies will go into the offensive after the monsoon. Mountbatten, the supreme Commander SEAC issued directives on future operations in Burma. The outline of the projected operations for SEAC went as follows:

- a. An advance across the Chindwin by 14 Army to occupy the Irrawaddy River, success to be exploited to include the capture of Mandalay.

- b. A complementary advance by NCAC and the Chinese Yunnan Force to the line Thabeikkyin-Mogok-Lashio.
- c. A limited advance in Arakan by 15 Corps to secure forward positions and prevents Japanese interference with Allied aircraft.
- d. A sea borne assaults (**OPERATION DRACULA**) to seize Rangoon.

### **FORCES INVOLVED**

4. **Allies.** The Allied 15 Corps commanded by Maj Gen Christition was used for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Arakan Campaign (**OPERATION ROMULUS**). Under command of 15 Corps were the following formations:

- a. 25 Indian Division.
  - b. 26 Indian Division (reserve).
  - c. 81 West African Division.
  - d. 82 West African Division.
  - e. 3 x commando brigade (reserve).
  - f. 50 Indian Tank Brigade.
  - g. Element of Royal Navy.
  - h. 224 Group Royal Air Force.
5. **Japanese.** The Japanese Force 15 Corps of the Japanese 28 Army commanded by Lt Gen Sakurai Seizo. The following were involved:
- a. 54 Division (one regiment).
  - b. 55 Division (only a part).

### **AIM**

6. To clear the Japanese from North Arakan with a view of releasing some of the division tied to the sector.

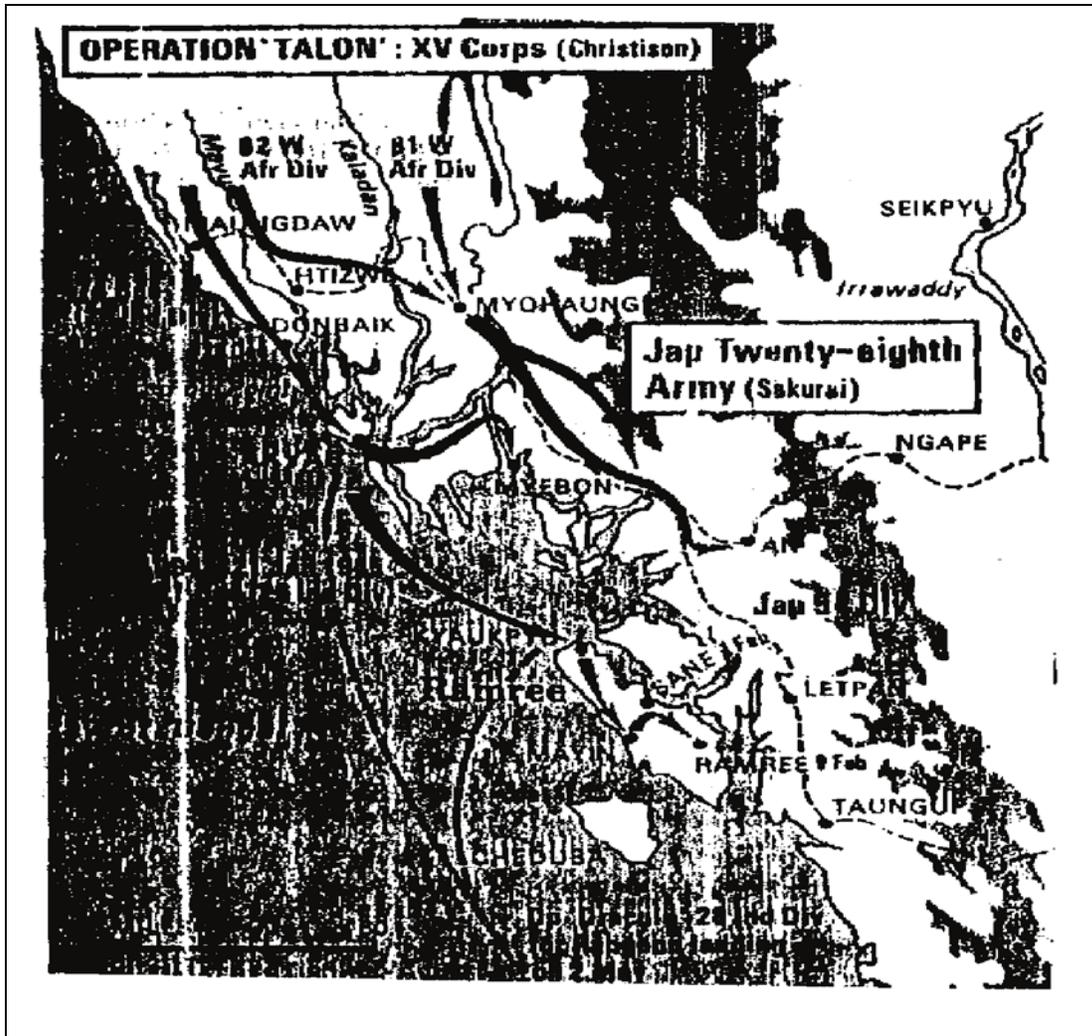
**PLAN**

7. **Allied Plan.** The Allied plan was to carry out a three pronged advance into Arakan as follows:

- a. 25 Indian Division to advance down the Mayu Peninsula.
- b. 81 West African Division along the Kaladan Valley.
- c. 82 West African Division along the Kalapanzin valley.

8. **Japanese Plan.** The Japanese had no ambitious plan other than to use as few as possible to hold vital entries into Arakan in order to check the Allies' advance.

**FIGURE 11: THIRD ARAKAN CAMPAIGN**



**THE ADVANCE**

9. The 15 Corps started its advance on 12 Dec 44 on a broad front along

the coast of the Bay of Bengal and toward Akyab as planned. 82 Division under Maj Gen GS Bruce advance rapidly along the Kalapanzin Valley and on 15 Dec 44 captured the much fought- over Buthidaung town and completely opened the road from Maungdaw to the Kalapanzin. The Division, within 5 days carried over 600 river craft from the ports area of Maungdaw through the Mayu Range and launched them in the Kalapanzin River. By 29 Dec 44, the whole Kalapanzin area had been cleared. It is important to note that this axis subsequently used in the maintenance of the 15 Corps advanced to the south.

10. **Operations in the Ka'adan Valley.** In the Kaladan Valley, 81 Division commanded by Maj Gen FG Loftus-Tottenham, advancing for the second time (first time was during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arakan) down the Kaladan Valley, by passed Kyawktaw and attacked Myohaung, a Japanese administrative base. The Division launched an attack on the town after carrying out a flanking movement through the east over a thick hill jungle while the 82 Division came in from the west. Myohaung was eventually taken by the converging movement of the two divisions on 25 Jan 44 after considerable fighting.

11. **Mayu Peninsula.** While 81 West African Division busy in their operations, 25 Division commanded by Maj Gen G Wood advanced down the Mayu Peninsula enriched Foul Point, The of the Peninsular on 26 Dec 44. The Division occupied Kudaung Island, north of Akyab which is separated from Kudaung by only a narrow channel. Amphibious operations were planned to capture not only Akyab Island but also Myebon Peninsular.

12. **Capture of Akyab Island.** An Amphibious operation was planned for Akyab Island which had been garrisoned by a Japanese regiment of three battalions. However, as a result of the unexpected advance of 81 Division, two of the battalions were transferred there to meet the threat. On 30 Dec 44 even the last battalion pulled out. The town subsequently captured single handedly by able Artillery officer who boldly landed on the airstrip after seen the locals making friendly signs. The elaborately organized attack schedule for 31 Jan 45, which was to involve all the 3 services, was no longer necessary. All the same 3 Commando Brigade still landed as planned and by 14 Jan 45, the Island was fully occupied by the Allied.

### **AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS**

13. The Commander, 15 Corps aim after the captured of Akyab Island was to trap the Japanese forces by cutting the costal road off them. He therefore planned to seize the Myebon Peninsula, thirty miles east of Akyab, by seaborne assault in a second amphibious operation strike at Kangaw, eight miles farther east.

14. **Landing at Myebon Peninsula.** The Landing at Myebon Peninsula was preceded by the selection of possible landing beaches by Naval Frog Men and small boat parties. On 12 Jan 45, a commando Brigade, landed by Division followed and the Japanese, hurriedly collecting their forces, counter-attacked in strength. They were beaten off and the Allied troops, fighting hard, proceeded to clear the whole Peninsula.

15. **Capture of Kangaw.** The capture of Kangaw was assigned to 3

Commando Brigade. The brigade landed on 22 Jan 44 near Kangaw under cover of sea and air bombardment and established a brigadehead. The Japanese launched a ferocious attack against the bridgehead but the Allies held on until the following night when a brigade of 25 Division was landed. Further attacks by the Japanese supported with artillery fire were repulsed in a hand-to-hand fighting. On 29 Jan 44, the Allies turned to the attack and captured Kangaw village.

16. **Seizure of the Island of Ramree and Cheduba.** The Island of Ramree and Cheduka are strategically located. This Island would provide the sea-supplied airfields that could maintain 14 Army in a dash for Rangoon. Ramree Island is 50 miles by 20 miles in its widest portion. It was occupied by a small but typical stubborn Chinese Garrison. On 21 Jan 45, a Brigade of 26 Division assaulted Kyaukpu at its northern end but it was not until six weeks later that the last of the enemy fugitives were crminated. Most of them fell victims to naval patrols and the sharks as they attempted to reach the main land in small crafts. Cheduba, a small Island, to the south of Ramree was occupied by marines without oppositions on 26 Jan 45.

### **FURTHER OPERATIONS**

17. **General Leese's Order.** About the time the Island were captured, General Leese ordered 14 Corps to carry out the following tasks with the first as a priority task:

- a. Develop Akyab and Ramree as air supply bases.
- b. Clear north and central Arakan.

- c. Establish a bridgehead at Taungup 50 miles south of Akyab.
- d. Open the Taungup-promo road, if possible before the monsoon.

18. **Capture of Tamandu and Taungup.** Despite problems of maintenance of his corps caused by the extended line of communication, Gen Christiton planned to deal with the Japanese who were now concentrated around Annd Taungup. His first attempt to encircle the Japanese at the An area using 82 West African Division had to be abandoned due to the drastic withdrawal of aircraft allocated to the corps. However, the Division later captured Tamandu with the assistance of 25 Division. By 13 May 45, An pass was crossed to contain the Japanese and round them up to prevent eastward escape, thus completing the liberation of Arakan.

### **LESSON LEARNT FROM THE THIRD ARAKAN CAMPAIGN**

19. The Third Arakan Campaign lasted from Dec 44 May 45. Though relatively small forces were involved, especially on Japanese side, the campaign was instructive in terms of lessons learnt. The following are some of these lessons:

- a. **Importance of Joint Operations.** The importance of combined arms operations was brought out during the campaign. Three services were actively involved for the first time in the Burma Campaign. The sea and air supply by the air force was the ultimate in co-operation amongst the services.
- b. **Significance of Higher Direction.** The Allied high command monitored the operation on continuous basis and issued

directives as the campaign progressed. It was demonstration of the importance attached to the liberation of Arakan as the key to the final push to Rangoon. Such interest shown by higher commanders gave confidence to subordinate commanders.

c. **Reserve.** In the course of the operation, one division and 3 commando brigades were kept in reserve. These reserves came in handy when the need to capture the Island of Ramree, Myebon, Kangaw and Cheduba arose as a way of exploiting successes. This was a testimony of the importance of maintaining a reserve in any operation.

d. **Security.** The need to provide security for an advancing force was also brought out in the operation. Throughout the campaign, 81 West African Division protected the exposed flank (the eastern flank) of the advancing force. Furthermore, the air force provided additional security by their domination of the air space.

e. **Maintenance of Momentum.** Another important lesson learnt was the effect of maintaining the momentum in an operation. Right from the commencement of the advance, the momentum was maintained which culminated into the capture of the Islands adjoining the Mayu Peninsula.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE ADVANCE TO MANDALAY AND MEIKTILA

#### BACKGROUND

1. An advance across the Chindwin by 14 Army was one of the tasks given to Gen Slim. This operation was given the code '**EXTENDED CAPITAL**'. Throughout the monsoon, apart from pursuing the Japanese across the Chindwin, the Allied forces carried out major reorganization and serious planning to execute the task of the Army. It is important to note that in the course of the pursuit, the Allied forces had established three bridgeheads at Sittang, Mawlaik and Kalewa. Gen Slim's intention was to fight the Japanese in a major battle in the open Shwebo plain located between the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy where his advantage in tanks and in the air would be exploited to the maximum.

2. Meanwhile, the disaster that had befallen the Japanese 15 Army during the Imphal and Kohima battles brought disgrace to Kawabe, who was replaced as commandser of the Burma A rea command by Gen Hoyataro Kimura. In the same vein, Lt Gen Shihachi Katanura also replaced Mutagushi as commander of the 15 Army. Kimura spent the summer months rebuilding his shattered forces. He planned to allow the Allies to

push into central Burma, where overextended lines would allow his ten Divisions inflict a crushing blow to the Allied Land Forces under Gen O Leese.

### **FORCE USED**

3. **Allies.** The Allies 14 Army under Gen Slim was involved in the operation. The Army was organized as follows:

a. **4 Corps.**

- (1) 7 Indian Division.
- (2) 17 Indian Division.
- (3) 255 Indian Brigade.
- (4) 28 East African Brigade.
- (5) Lushai Brigade.

b. **33 Corps.**

- (1) 2 British Division.
- (2) 19 Indian Division.
- (3) 20 Indian Division.
- (4) 254 Indian tank Brigade.
- (5) 268 Independent Infantry Brigade.

c. 5 Indian Division in Army Reserve.

d. Burma National Army under Gen Aung San.

e. 221 Group RAF.

4. **Japanese Forces.** The Japanese Burma Area Army under Gen Kimura faced the Allied Forces in their advance to Mandalay and Meiktila. The Japanese Forces were organized as follows:

- a. **28 Army.**
    - (1) 54 Division.
    - (2) 55 Division.
    - (3) 72 Independent Mobile Brigade.
  - b. **15 Army**
    - (1) 15 Division.
    - (2) 31 Division.
    - (3) 33 Division.
    - (4) 24 Independent Mobile Brigade.
  - c. **33 Army**
    - (1) 2 Division.
    - (2) 18 Division.
    - (3) 53 Division.
    - (4) 56 Division.
  - d. 49 Division (Burma Area Army Reserve).
5. The Allied aim of the operation was to advance across the Chindwin and occupy the Mandalay area destroying the Japanese forces in the area in the process.

## **PLAN**

6. **Allied Plan.** Gen Slims's initial plan was to cross the Chindwin and fight the bulk of the Japanese Army on the Shwebo plain north of the Irrawaddy where the Allied tanks, artillery and air support would be exploited to the greatest advantage. However, Gen Kimura, the new commander of the Japanese force in Burma decided to deploy his forces east

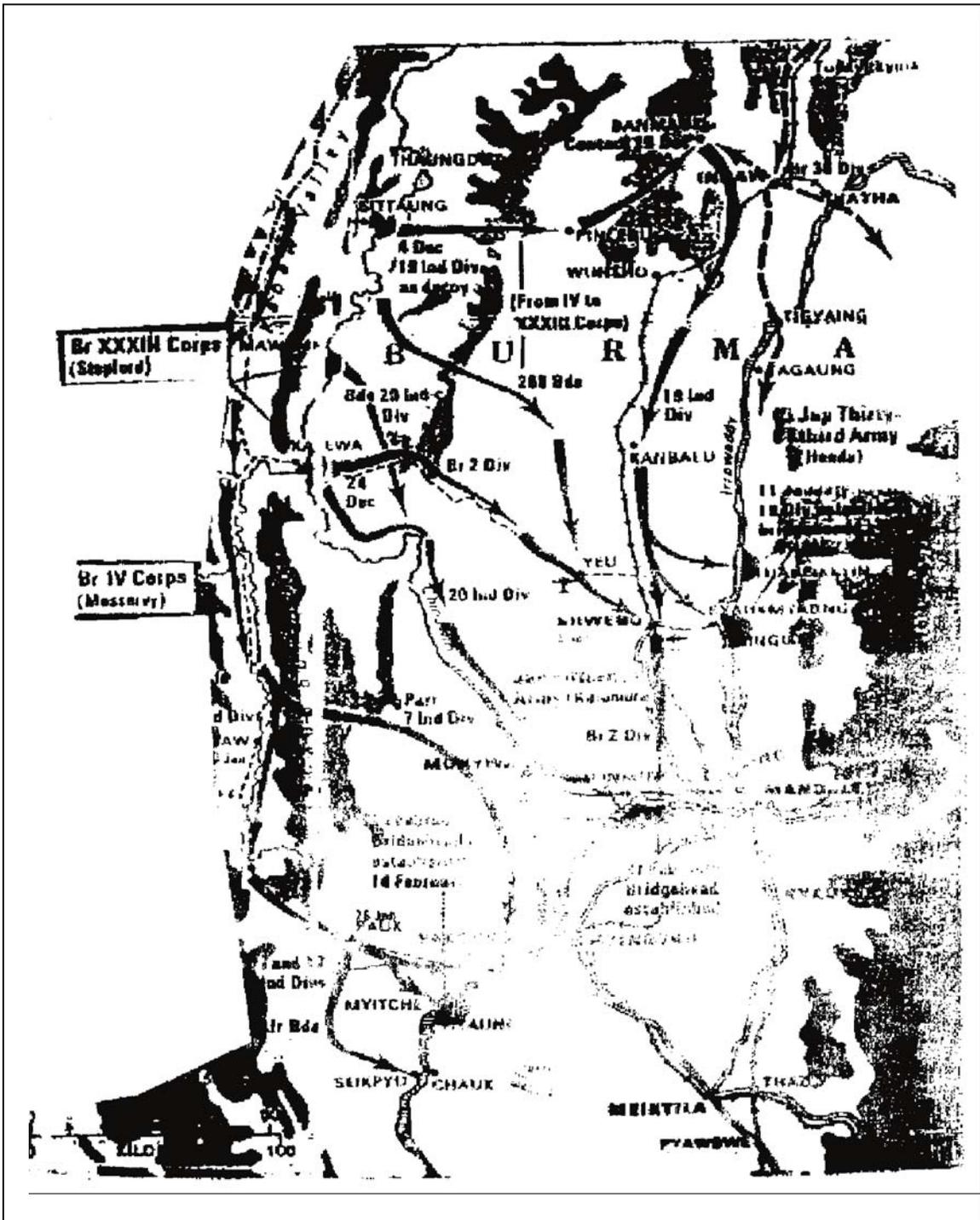
of the Irrawaddy. Slim therefore revised his plan, the outline of which was as follows:

- a. 33 Corps to cross the Irrawaddy north and west of Madalay to draw the bulk of Kimura's division.
  - b. 4 Corps to move secretly south through the Gangaw Valley, seize a crossing at Pakokku and violently strike at Meiktila, the main Japanese administrative centre with an Armour and airborne operation.
7. **Japanese Plan.** Gen Kimura decided not to risk a battle in the open Shwebo plain with his battered forces. He therefore adopted the following plan:
- a. Withdraw his forces behind the Irrawaddy, leaving only light covering forces.
  - b. Defend the east bank of the Irrawaddy and cripple the Allied forces as they crossed the river.
  - c. Destroyed the Allied forces with the help of the monsoon as they withdrew to the Chindwin.

### **PREPARATIONS**

8. **Allies.** The Allies preparation for the offensive included the following:
- a. Reorganization of 4 and 33 Corps.

**FIGURE 12: ADVANCE TO MANDALAY AND MEIKTILA**



- b. Training on Mechanical operations (infantry/tank cooperation) and river crossing operations.
- c. Securing of river crossing equipment.

9. **Japanese.** The Japanese main preparations were the redeployment of its forces along the shore of the Irrawaddy River and preparation of defence in likely crossing places.

### **CONDUCT**

10. **Crossing by 33 Corps.** 33 Corps commenced its crossing of the Irrawaddy after clearing the Shwebo plain and the west bank of the river. The 19 Indian Division crossed and established a bridgehead on 9 Feb 45 at Thabeikkym, 60 miles to Mandalay. On 12 Feb 45, 20 Division secured their bridgehead at Ngazun, southwest of Mandalay while 2 Division secured their foothold at Sinzu on 21 Feb 45. All the Bridgeheads were strongly attacked but these were repulsed with the assistance of artillery and air support. Consolidation and expansion of the bridgeheads continued amidst the Japanese pressure.

11. **Crossing by 4 Corps.** While Kimura was struggling with 33 Corps' bridgeheads in the north, 4 Corps advanced steadily southwards, observing strict radio silence. The corps passed through the Kabaw Valley and in the second week of February reached Pakokku after advancing for about 300 miles. Crossing started on 13 Feb when 7 Indian Division established a bridgehead at Nyaungu encountering only slight opposition. Further crossing followed immediately with the establishment of bridgeheads by 17 and 4 Divisiions.

12. **Capture of Meiktila.** Entrusting 4 Division with the defence of the bridgeheads, 17 Division spearheaded by 255 Indian Tank Brigade,

broke out of the bridgehead to start its dramatic dash for Meiktila. The town, the heart of the Japanese administrative area with rail and road heads, was attacked from 4 directions on 28 Feb 45. After a bitter hand-to-hand fighting, Meiktila was captured on 3 Mar 45 by 17 Division who immediately dug in.

13. **Japanese Counter-Attack.** Realizing that the fall of Meiktila would sealed his faith in Burma, Kimura acted promptly. He withdrew parts of 33 Corps, diverted reinforcement moving to Mandalay and other troops defending the shores of the Irrawaddy to form a strong enough to retake Meiktila. He placed this force under Gen Honda who surrounded the city and launched several attacks against it. The defenders stood firmly and repulsed all the attacks. The siege lasted for 3 weeks during which 17 Division was supplied by air and their casualties evacuated by air. On 17 Mar, the Division was reinforced by 9 Bde of 5 Division which was air lifted to Meiktila. Gen Honda launched a final attack against the town but was pushed back by 17 Division supported by the new arrivals. Realizing that his position was no longer tenable, Kimura decided to pull back his forces on 29 Mar 45. He did this with great skill through the smaller rail junction at Thazi and escaped to the east of Meiktila.

14. **Fall of Mandalay.** To the north, 9 Division broke out of their bridgeheads and pushed towards Mandalay. The division reached the outskirts of the town and faced stiff opposition. However, with the threat to Meiktila and the subsequent division of reinforcement for Mandalay, 19 Division succeeded in entering the town. Mandalay was finally captured in a house to house fighting on 20 Mar 45. Freed of the need to keep

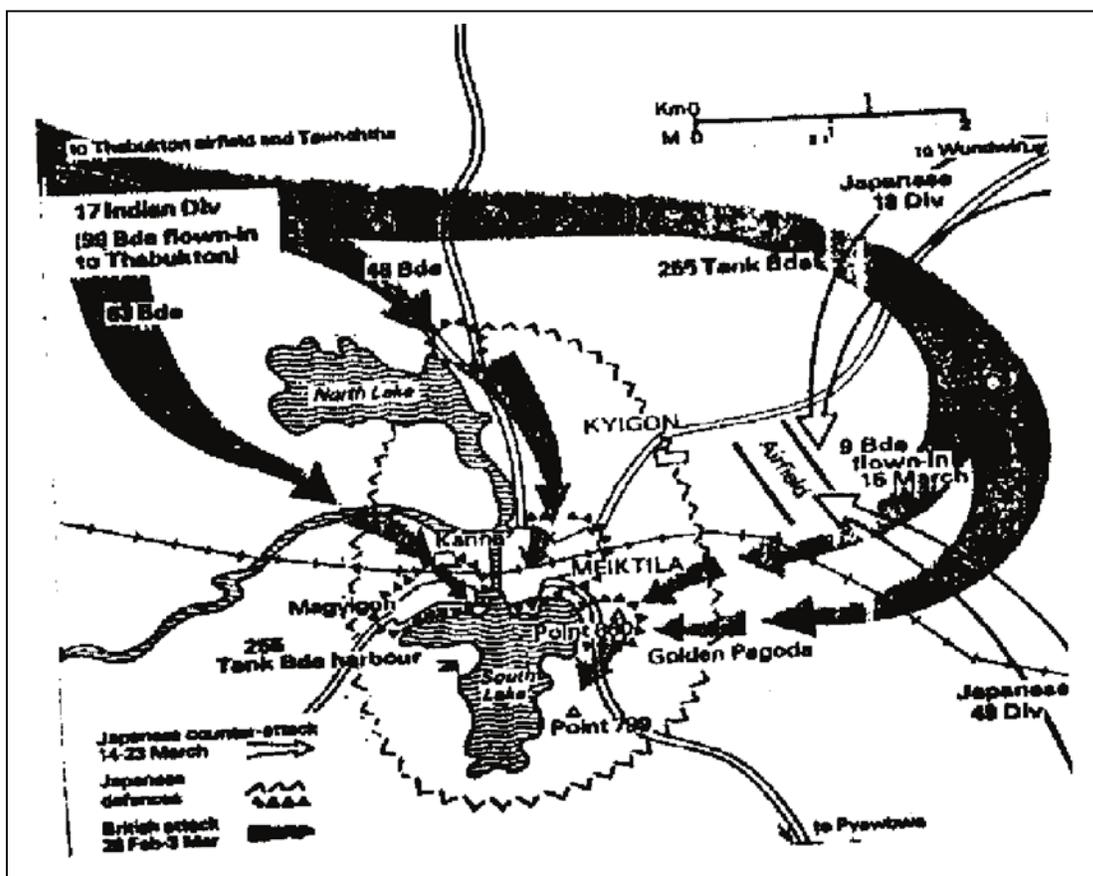
Mandalay's defence pinned down, 33 Corps was then able to advance south to relieve the hard-pressed 17 Division in Meiktila.

### **LESSONS LEARNT**

15. The advance to and capture of Mandalay and Meiktila brought out the following lessons:

- a. **Deception Measures.** Deception is a crucial consideration in the planning for an operation. Appropriate deceptive measures are vital to achieve surprise against the enemy. Gen Slim's deception plan which some military analysis called the 'Master stroke' was the feint crossing by 33 Corps while the main crossing was launched further to the north. This demonstrated the need to include deception plans in any operation.

### **FIGURE 13: MANDALAY AND MEIKTILA BATTLES**



b. **Secrecy.** Another important lesson learnt was the impact secrecy had on the outcome of Slim's mission. The movement of 4 was happening throughout the 300 miles advance of 4 Corps. The result of the operation would have been otherwise if the Japanese were aware of the movement.

c. **Importance of Disrupting the Enemy's Line of Communication.** Fighting troops can not operate effectively without proper administration. Their supplies need to be replenished, casualties to be evacuated and troops reinforce to make up for losses. A these are to pass through the line of communication is as good as attacking his forces as they would be ineffective without supplies.

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Slim's plan to capture Meikitila was for this purpose and once the town was taken the Japanese position became untenable and Kimura ordered a withdrawal.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**

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## THE RACE TO RANGOON

### BACKGROUND

1. Planning for capture of Rangoon and started at the height of the struggle for Mandalay and Meiktila, well, before the two cities fell. Gen Slim issued his operational instruction for the advance to Rangoon on 23 March, but the Japanese counter offensive around Meiktila delayed 4 Corps' advance southwards. The Army commander had great misgiving as to whether Rangoon could be taken over land before monsoon. The capture of Akyab and Ramree Island and the developments of the airfields therein, solve the problem of maintaining 14 Army by air. However, the preponderance of old vehicles and the fact that the advancing forces have to cover 300 miles in 30 days made the capture of Rangoon ambitious. That apart, it was felt that the usually tenacious Japanese defenders would cause further delays.

2. Consequently, **OPERATION DRACULA**, which was an envisaged sea and air borne assault against Rangoon but dropped with the likelihood of an overland advance to Rangoon, was revisited. The original concept of **OPERATION DRACULA** was that it would be an alternative method of capturing Rangoon but under the prevailing circumstances, **DRACULA** was to be launched as a complimentary operation to the overland advance being made by 4 and 33 Corps.

3. Meanwhile, the Japanese Burma Area Army was in disarray after the fall of Mandalay and Meiktila. Kimura however, recognised his 28 and 33

Armies with a view to preventing the Allies' advance to Rangoon. Kimura's predicament was further compounded by a revolt by the Burma National Army (BNA). The uprising was carried out on 26 Mar 45 when BNA officers and soldiers defected to the Allies. Gen Slim got in touch with Maj Gen AUNG San commander of BNA and an agreement was reached where BNA units were to be armed, administered and to fight against the Japanese under Allied direction.

### **FORCES USED**

4. **Allied Forces.** The Allied for their overland advance to and the Amphibious landing in Rangoon, used the following forces:

a. **4 Corps**

- (1) 5 Division.
- (2) 17 Division.
- (3) 255 tank Brigade.

b. **33 Corps**

- (1) 2 British Division. (to remain in Irrawaddy).
- (2) 7 Division.
- (3) 20 Division.

c. 19 Division (directly under the control of 14 Army).

d. 221 Group RAF.

e. **Task Force for Amphibious Landing.**

- (1) 26 Indian Division.
- (2) 50 Indian Parachute Brigade.
- (3) Naval Carrier Force.
- (4) 224 Group RAF.

(5) Squadrons of Strategic Air Force.

5. **Japanese Forces.** The following Japanese Forces were involved in the operation.

a. **15 Army**

- (1) 56 Division.
- (2) Remnant of other divisions.

b. **28 Army**

- (1) 54 Division.
- (2) 55 Division.
- (3) 2 Indian National Army Division.
- (4) 7 x Infantry Division.
- (5) 3 x Artillery Battalions.

c. **33 Army**

- (1) 18 Division
- (2) 49 Division
- (3) 53 Division

**PLAN**

6. **Allied Plan.** The Allied plan for the race and capture of Rangoon was as follows:

- a. 4 Corps to push down the railway axis and take Rangoon as the main striking force.
- b. 33 Corps to advance astride the Irrawaddy, capture Chauk and cut off Yenangyaung by a flanking movement on Magwe and advance to Rangoon.

- c. 19 Division to be used to protect the flanks and 4 Corps line of communication.
7. **Japanese Plan.** The Japanese plan was as follows:
- a. 33 Army to hold Pyawbwe, astride the road and railway to Toungoo.
  - b. 28 Army to prevent Allied advance down the Irrawaddy.
  - c. 56 Division and the remnant of 15 Army to threaten and counter-attack the flanks of the Allied force advancing along the railway.

### **PREPARATIONS**

8. **Allies.** In preparing for the operation, the Allies regrouped her forces. The two fully mechanized divisions (5 and 7) with a tank brigade was placed under 4 Corps who was to advance astride the Meiktila-Rangoon rail lines as the main striking force. Further, 4 and 33 Corps were tasks to carry out mopping up operations within the Myingyan-Mandalay-Wundwin Chuck area. In Ramree and Akyab Islands, the Naval Task Force was assembled. Also a parachute battalion was trained for the air borne landing in Rangoon.

9. **Japanese.** The Japanese also made preparations to prevent the Allied advance to Rangoon. Apart from reorganizing his force, Kimura gave instructions to his subordinate commanders to prepare all major settlements along the axis of advance as strong points. In addition, all bridges were prepared for reserves demolition.

### **CONDUCT**

10. The race to Rangoon was between 4 corps advancing in the railway corridors, 33 Corps Division leading. In the Vanguard of the Division was 255 Tank Brigade. The division reached Shwemyo on 16 Apr after being delayed.

11. By Japanese rear guards at Yamethin. Progress was made as the Allies cleared various Japanese strongholds and open up airfields along the axis of advance. Toungoo was captured on 22 Apr ahead of the Japanese who were racing to the town to reinforce it. Penwagon was taken over on 24 Apr and the following day, 17 Division took the lead. 17 Division met opposition in Pegu on 28 Apr but the town was captured on 29 Apr after a heavy bombardment followed by a flanking attack. Unfortunately, for 4 Corps, the monsoon rains commenced on 1 May and further advance was drastically reduced. On 2 May, the landing of 15 Corps at Rangoon was received. In spite of the news, and the water soaked terrain, 17 miles from Rangoon where they linked up with a small column of 26 Division advancing northwards from Rangoon.

#### **FIGURE 14: RACE TO RANGOON**



advance, 33 Corps also set off on the Irrawaddy axis and captured Chauk on 20 Apr. The Corps pushed ahead, clearing Japanese rear guards until prome was entered on 3 May. Further advance was delayed due to logistic problems. However, a Brigade resumed the advance and took Tharrawaddy on 15 May. Later same day, a patrol from 11 Light Calvary Battalion who was leading 33Corps advance met with the advance guard of 26 Division advancing from Rangoon at Milestone 60. It is important to remember 33 Corps advance astride the Irrawaddy not only protected the west flank of 4 Corps but also cut off the remainder of the Japanese 28 Army in Arakan.

13. **The Fall of Rangoon.** 5 Corps operation, (**OPERATION DRACULA**) commenced on 27 Apr when the Naval Task Force sailed in six convoys from Ramree and Akyab Island. While the convoy were approaching Rangoon, a Garhka Parachute Battalion launched an airborne attack on Elephant Point after a Naval and air bombardment on 1 May against minor opposition. The sweeping of the entrance of River Rangoon commenced immediately. Meanwhile, on the night of ½ Apr, an Allied pilot reported sighting a message 'Japs gone, Exdigitate' on the roof of the Rangoon jail. Though the use of the RAF slang 'Exdigitate' indicated the genuineness of the message, the amphibious landing was still carried out as planned. This was done by the landing of 36 and 71 Brigades of 26 Division on both banks of the river. They probed towards Rangoon to link up with the paratroopers and proceeded to the city under heavy rain which started as soon as the division landed. Sa the 26 Division was advancing on Rangoon, another RAF Pilot, Wing Commander Saunder on a recce mission on the afternoon of 2 May, seeing no signs of the Japanese, decided to land at the Mingaladon airfield. He visited the Allied prisoners in the Rangoon jail,

commandeered a sampan and sailed down the Rangoon River and met 26 Division. The division subsequently advanced to the town and occupied it on 3 May without firing a single shot.

14. **Pursuit.** The Burma Campaign did not end with the fall of Rangoon. Pockets of the Japanese were still found in the Irrawaddy Valley, the Shan Hills, east of the Sittang and the Mokpalin area. 4 and 33 Corps as well as 26 Division was ordered to clear the Japanese in the various locations. In spite of difficulties of moving over through flooded country side, the Allied troops hunted down the Japanese as they escaped eastwards to Thailand. The few Japanese who slipped through the Allied formations were stalked and ambushed by the Burmese Patriotic Forces (former BNA) and the armed resistance parties organized in many villages. Between 6 and 9 Aug 45, atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively and on 14 Aug 45, the Japanese surrendered unconditionally. Gen Slim became the commander, Allied Land Forces in South East Asia.

## **LESSONS**

15. The Allied advance to Rangoon brought out many important lessons. Apart from the effect of logistics on operations, security of advancing forces and the need for combined operations, the effect of weather in battle was demonstrated. Most commanders usually down-play, the influence of weather on the outcome of a battle or campaign. If the amphibious landing was not mounted to compliment the overland advance by 4 Corps, Rangoon could not have been captured or taken much later and at a greater cost.

16. Another lesson learnt was that the enemy would always be surprised if

the unexpected were done. Gen Slim's decision to advance to Rangoon took Kamura by surprise because he never expected the push in view of the fast approaching monsoon and the shortage of supplies within the Allied forces. Though it was risk, the bold decision paid off in the end.

**CHAPTER TWELVE**

## **SUMMARY AND REVISION QUESTIONS**

### **SUMMARY**

1. Burma Campaign started with the invasion of the country on Jan 42 and lasted till Aug 45 when the last Japanese fugitives were pushed out of Burma. The campaign involved many distinct battles and operations, which are briefly recapitulated below. A chronicle of major operations also shown graphical form is shown in figure 15.

2. **Causes of the Burma Campaign.** There were both remote and immediate causes of the Burma campaign:

a. **Remote Causes.** The following were the remote causes:

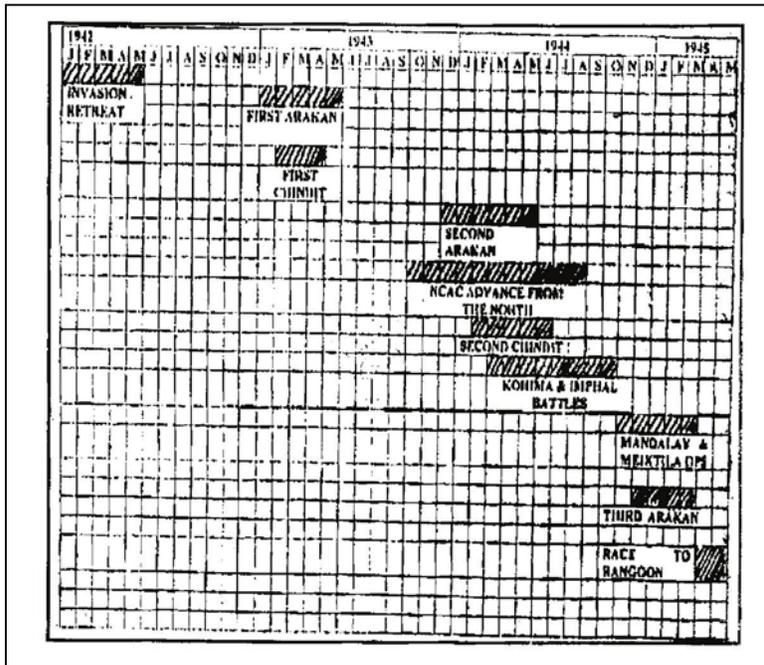
- (1) Humiliation of Japan.
- (2) World economic crises.
- (3) Japanese expansionist tendencies.
- (4) Quest for raw materials.
- (5) Quest for markets for finished products.
- (6) The war in Europe.
- (7) Colonial activities of Western powers.
- (8) Need to liberate colonize Asian countries.
- (9) Neutrality treaty between Japan and Russia.

b. **Immediate Causes.** The immediate causes were as follows:

- (1) Japanese occupation of French indo-China.
- (2) Trade Embargo against Japan.

- (3) Breakdown of negotiations between Japan and America.
- (4) Attack on Pearl Harbour.
- (5) Japan's invasion of South East Asian countries including Burma.

**FIGURE 15: CHRONICLE OF MAJOR OPERATION IN GRAPHICAL FORM**



3. **Invasion and Allied Retreat.** Japan invaded Burma with its 15 Army on 8 Jan 42 through the eastern border of Burma. The defences of the 17 Indian Division were inadequate to resist the Japanese onslaught and the Allies have to pull back. In the course of the withdrawal the Allied suffered one defeat after the other includes a disaster in the Sittang Bridge. Here 2 bridges were cut off and most of them drowned in their attempt to cross the river. Rangoon, which was the main supply base for the Allies,

was captured few months into the operation. The assistance of the Chinese forces that were brought in later did not help matters. The withdrawal from Rangoon to Imphal in India covered about 900 miles and lasted four months.

4. **The First Arakan Campaign.** Sequel to the retreat and the full in operations, training was intensified. Thereafter, there was need to conduct small-scale operations in order to raise the morale of the Allied forces. The first Arakan Campaign was mounted for this purpose as well as for training. 14 Indian Division was used for the operation. The Division advance astride the Mayu range in last week of 1942. The advances commence smoothly initially but delayed ensued as a result of several obstacles along the way and Japanese delaying tactics. These enable the Japanese to reinforce their oppositions. The Divisions was halted in front Dibaik and Rathedaung from Jan Mar 43. The Japanese later counter-attacked, both frontally and over the mountains to the east that the British had considered impassable. 14 Indian Division therefore retreated in disarray, leaving the Japanese still holding Arakan.

5. **First Chindit Operation.** At the same time that Gen Wavell initiated the first Arakan Campaign, he also gave permission for a second operation that might booster Allied morale. This operation was Wingate's First Chindit operation undertaken by 77 Indian Brigade. The main aim of the operation was to operate behind the Japanese positions, cutting lines of communications, gathering intelligence and causing confusion. The forces were relied on air supply for essentials. The Brigade was split into two groups, the southern one crossing the Chindwin first as a diversion for the northern group. The groups marched for 15 days and cut 30 miles of rail

line. Further advance towards the Irrawaddy was difficult as the Japanese massed superior force against them. Wingate abandoned further operations, split his forces into smaller groups and ordered them back to India. More than 33 percent of the forces used were lost but the operation was a definite propaganda and morale success and many valuable lessons were learnt.

6. **Second Arakan Campaign.** The Second Arakan Campaign was one of the operations projected by Lord Mountbatten, Commander of the newly formed SEAC. The aim of the operation was to clear the Japanese forces out of Arakan. 15 Corps who undertook the operations had its 7 Division advancing astride the Mayu Range and 5 Division on the Range itself. 81 West African Division advanced down the Kaladan Valley as a flank guard. The advance initially went on well but the Japanese, who were planning an invasion of eastern India by Mutaguchi's 15 Army, soon halted the Allied forces along the line Maungdaw-Buthidaung road and prepared a counter stroke. While the Doi column pinned down the 5 and 7 Indian Divisions, the Col Kubo's force moved through the eastern flank jungle and mountains considered impassable and cut off the two divisions. Gen Slim, commanding the Allied forces refused to withdraw and decided to supply the encircled division by air. After bitter fighting, the two surrounded divisions made contact with each other on February and in turn cut off part of the Japanese defences and began to advance on Akyab again but was halted by the need to send reinforcement to Imphal. The Japanese were defeated in a major battle for the first time in the Burma Campaign. They lost over 5,000 men as against the Allies's 3506 men. The Allies began to feel individual superiority over the Japanese.

7. **The Advance by the NCAC and the Second Chindit.** NCAC

under Gen Stilwell was ordered to advance and occupy Myitkyina area to cover the building of the Ledo-China road. Wingate's Second Chindit operations were to assist Stilwell by cutting the line of communication of the Japanese division facing Stilwell. Japanese resistance was tough in the Hukawng Valley. Stilwell was able to resume his advance after months delay on 24 Dec 43. Forces made up of 2 Chinese divisions, Merrill Marauders and a Burma Rifles (Kachin leveies) advanced southwards. Their combined efforts resulted to the captured of Walawbum, Sumprabum Tangzup, Kamaing and Mogaung. All these were achieved in the face of stiff Japanese resistance. Stilwell later dispatched a task force of 3 brigades on a long march to capture Myikyina. Meanwhile, to compliment Stilwell's advance, the main force of the second Chindit was flown in by gliders and later by transport aircraft to their assigned locations. Another brigade had earlier marched in from Ledo. Wingate was killed in air crash on 25 March and was succeeded by Maj Gen W Lentaigne. Finally exhausted, most of the Chindit were flown out from Lake Indawgyi in Jan and Jul 44 leaving only 77 and 16 Brigades behind. Earlier in May, the exhausted and disease-ridden Marauders failed to take Myitkyina but after the fall of Mogaung, a combined Allied force finally took the town on 3/4 Aug.

8. **The Imphal and Kohima Battles.** The Japanese had a long standing plan to invade India. The Allied were also planning an offensive against the Japanese pre-empted the Allies attack by moving in to occupy Imphal and Kohima plain considered a suitable ground from which the Allied could launch their offensive. The Allied Forces in Imphal were cut off by the Japanese 31 Division in the first week of April while those in Kohima by the Japanese 15 and 33 Divisions, Gen Slim ordered to fight

through the two towns and rescue the cut off commander sent a brigade to reinforce the garrison while the other brigade carried out a pincer movement to trap the Japanese. The Japanese after several fierce battles lasting from April to June 44 finally pushed back the Japanese. Meanwhile, to the south 4 Corps was similarly involved in attacks against the perimeter of the Allied defences but all were maintained during the siege by air. It was not until 22 June that the 2 division advancing from Kohima linked up with 4 Corps in Imphal and rescue the embattled garrison. The Japanese 24 Army pulled back closely pursued by the Allied land and Air force. The battle in Imphal and Kohima cost the Japanese some 65,000 deaths.

9. **The Third Arakan Campaign.** The Third Campaign was aimed at clearing the Japanese from North Arakan. The task was given to 15 Corps who advanced on 12 Dec 44 astride the Mayu Range with one division each advancing on both sides of the range and on top of the range. In addition, the 81 West African Division advanced along the Kalapanzin had cleared the area similarly, 25 Indian Division advanced on the Mayu peninsula on 26 Dec 44. Also 81 Division assisted by 82 Division cleared Kaladan Valley culminating in the capture of Myohaung, a Japanese administrative base. The success was exploited by the unopposed capture of Akyab Island. Amphibious operations were subsequently launched to capture Myebon peninsula, Kangaw as well as Ramree and Cheduba Islands. Arakan was finally liberated when the Allies crossed the An Pass to round up the Japanese escaping eastwards.

10. **The Advance to Mandalay and Meiktila.** The Allied 14 Army continued its exploits against the Japanese with air advance to Mandalay in

well planned and organized river crossing operations involving 4 and 33 Corps made a faint crossing and established brigade heads at Ngazun. Thabeikkyin and Sinzu respectively. The brigadehead, were expanded amidst pressure from Japanese who were deceived into believing that this was the main crossing . Mandalay was captured on 20 Mar and 33 Corps advanced southwards. While 33 Corps was engaged with the Japanese, 4 Corps secretly advanced southwards through the Kambaw Valley. The Corps established brigadeheads at Pakokku. Nyaungu and Chauk without any serious opposition. 17 Indian Division rushed forward from brigadeheads and captured Meiktila on 3 Mar 45. The Japanese realised that they had been deceived and switched their attention to Meiktila and mounted several unsuccessful attacks against the town. Meiktila was under siege for 3 weeks but the defenders survived relying on air supplies. The Japanese were finally pushed back on 29 Mar 45 when more Allied reinforcement arrived.

11. **Race to Rangoon.** The capture of Rangoon before the monsoon which was fast approaching was the main preoccupation of the Allies after the fall of Meiktila. The race between 4 Corps advancing astride the Irrawaddy, an amphibious task force sailing from Akyab Island from Akyab Island and course the monsoons. 4 Corps advance as the main thrust was delayed, by series of Japanese resistance along the route. Consequently, Rangoon was captured by 26 Division under the task force on 2 May 45 when 4 Corps was 25 miles away from Rangoon. 33 Corps was similarly delayed in their advance. After capturing Chauk, Prome and other towns they made contact at Milestone 60 with elements of 26 Division advancing northwards from Rangoon. With the capture of Rangoon, the Japanese were completely flushed out of Burma in various mopping up operations.

**SELF ASSESMENT QUESTIONS**

12. The following are some questions for self assessment:
- a. What were the implications of Burma's geographical features for military operations during the Burma Campaign?
  - b. What were the immediate causes of the Burma Campaign?
  - c. What special strategic values had Burma for Japanese territorial ambitions?
  - d. In what ways is it true that much of the war of supply in Burma was between the parachutes and the paddy-field?
  - e. Account for the initial defeat of the Allies at the outbreak of the Burma Campaign?
  - f. What violation of the principles of war led to the failure of the Burma Campaign?
  - g. The conduct of the second Arakan Campaign offers useful lessons of strategy of attack. What were these lessons and how did they bear on the Burma Campaign?
  - h. Evaluate the level of success of Wingate's First Mission, would you agree that the mission achieved its specific aims?
  - i. The imminent invasion of India posed special problems of strategy for the Allied commander. What were these problems and in what ways did his decision influence the final outcome of the encounter?
  - j. The Japanese invasion of India failed not so much for inferiority of arms, but for logistic constraints. Discuss.
  - k. What special tactical lessons are contained in Allies's plans for

the liberation of Arakan?

l. Defend the statement that the Allies' capture of Rangoon and the final prosecution of the Burma Campaign were not just a fight against the enemy, but against the weather.

m. How did the capture of Rangoon signal the end of the Burma Campaign for Mountbatten and his Allied Commanders and what lessons strategy and tactics were contained in the event?

### **SPECIMEN CANDIDATE ANSWER**

#### **GENERAL**

13. Burma Campaign is largely misunderstood by most Nigerian Army Officers because of lack of adequate reference materials and the ad-hoc approach to its teaching. Apart from trying to satisfy the requirements of the SSCQE, it is doubtful if there is any other forum where the Burma's Campaign is treated in any great detail. The quality of the candidates' answer scripts coupled with the depth of understanding displayed implies a skewed knowledge of the campaign.

14. The absence of good maps as well as the dearth of relevant reading materials has remained a major obstacle to a thorough understanding of the campaign.

15. The Specimen Candidate Answer is meant to convey the possible quality and length of answer required from candidates; especially as candidates are often tempted to reproduce past possible DS solution that are usually up to 7 or 8 typed pages. The candidates may lack the time and

capacity to carry out such demanding task under examination conditions.

**QUESTION**

16. Give an account of the preparation and conduct of the First Arakan Campaign under the following headings:

- a. Aim (3mks).
- b. The plan (5mks).
- c. The conduct (6mks).
- d. Reasons for the failure (6mks).

17. **Introduction.** The First Arakan Campaign was one of the series of one of the organized battles meant to capture objectives as part of an overall plan to raised the morale of Allied troops as a prelude to retake from the Japanese.

18 **Aim.** The aim of the First Arakan Campaign was to clear the Mayu Peninsular, capture the Island Akyab and Lake Rangoon.

19. **PLAN**

a. **Allies.** The Allied plan was top used of 14 Indian Div to advance astride the Mayu Range with a flanking detachment still further east in the Kaladan Valley.

b. **Japan.** The Japanese defensive plan was as follows:

- (1) Maintained defensive positions in Dombaik and
- (2) Positions were made up of deep bunkers covered with logs and earth to render them bullet proof. These were camouflaged and each sited in groups to provide mutual

support.

20. **CONDUCT**

- a. **The Attack.** The advance by 14 Indian Division commenced by mid Dec 42 as planned. The troops led by Slim and Maj Gen Lyold, advance initially and captured Maungdaw and Buthdaung but movement was slowed down as many creeks have to be bridged. This gave Japanese who were defending the bunkers time to construct strong defences. The Japanese company who inflicted heavy casualties whenever a frontal attack was launched against them. British troops often ran over the bunkers but knowing that they were in the open and unprotected, the Japanese artillery would fire at their positions inflicting injuries and casualties. Attack after attack were launched, the final one on 18 Mar 43 over ran the enemy position but could not hold it. The stalemate and ding-dung affair was broken when the Japanese were reinforced to launch a brilliant counter-attack.
- b. **The Counter Attack.** The counter attack was launched by the Japanese 55 Division led by Col Tanahashi. The main thrust came from Akyab while the other units walked their way over what was hitherto regarded as impassable mountain range to strike the British on the right and left flanks. Despite reinforcements sent to British Forces, they could not stop the Japanese infiltration tactics. So, the British troops withdrew losing over 25,000 men and large volume of equipment.
21. **Reasons for Failure.** The following are the reasons for the failure

of the campaign:

- a. **Lack of Adequate Appreciation.** The offensive was too ambitious for the state of training and morale of the forces used. This portrays poor appreciation on the part of the Allied high command.
- b. **Poor Strategy.** The British used 9 Brigade for the offensive. The terrain did not favour the employment of such a large force. Thus their numerical superiority was ineffective.
- c. **Command and Control.** 14 Division had as much 9 Brigades. This was too much for a division to control. If such a large number of brigades were necessary, perhaps 2 divisions could have been used with the Corps commanders exercising full operational control of the operation.
- d. **Bad Tactics.** The British troops still regarded the jungle as impenetrable. The Japanese on the other hand came over the Mayu Range through and over the precipitous slopes avoided by the Allies as being impassable. Their failure to put forces on the crest of the range was based on this premise.
- e. **High Vulnerability to Tropical Diseases.** The climatic and vegetative conditions of the theatre made it conducive for vector insects. Hence the incidence of malaria, fever and other tropical diseases were high. However, the introduction of mepererine and DDT limited the scourge of malaria and typhoid on the British troops.
- f. **Poor Mobility.** The Japanese traveled very light hence easily passed through the jungle whenever necessary. The Allied forces were still dependent of motor transport and hardly venture into the jungle.

g. **Declining Morale.** Prior to the Arakan Campaign, the morale of the Allied troops were on the raise as they successfully penetrated into Japanese territory using small patrols. However, the disruption of training by the Indian riot lack of suitable sea craft for an amphibious assault and shortage of air power caused the original plans of the Allies to be abandoned. Further more, the corps failure of 1943 due to early monsoon resulted to excessive boarding of grains. All these adversely affected the morale of the troops.

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**MILITARY HISTORY**

**VOLUME 3**

**NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN**

**CHAPTER ONE**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **PREAMBLE**

1. The war in the desert presented conditions and problems to both sides in the campaign for none of the combatants on either side were really prepared for desert warfare. Scorching days and bitter nights; lack of cover and tactical features which meant that places at which defensive positions could be prepared were few and far apart; navigational difficulties; unaccustomed ailments all these contributed to the problems which each side were compelled to face.

2. Of all the European powers, the Italians were accustomed to the climate in the desert. Although they rearmed first, by 1940, their weapon had become obsolete. The British on their part were more or less acclimatized thanks to the facts that a number of their regulars, officers and men, had seen a good deal of service in India, Palestine, Egypt. Quiet apart from the fact that they were used to the sun, there were eccentrics among them who had actually made long trips into the desert and had devised navigational aids. These flashes of private initiative were to be of great advantage when places like the Siwa Oasis and units like the Long Range Desert Group, began to be of tactical importance. It was greatly to the credit of the methodical Germans that, with little previous experience of conditions in the Middle East, they were able to produce at short notice their admirable Afrika Korps.

3. However, the greatest of all the problems in the desert war, and the one, which was eventually to prove crucial, was the age old military

essential of supply. The distance between the main Axis supply. The distance between the main Axis supply base at Tripoli, and the Allied bases around Alexandria was 1,500 miles of largely waterless and roadless desert with few intermediate harbours at which new depots could be established. All essentials, (petrol, water, ammunition, and food) have to be brought up along rough and highly vulnerable lines of communication.

4. This accentuated the basic military axiom that an advancing army becomes increasingly vulnerable as its supply line stretch, and a retreating one becomes correspondingly stronger in proportion as it falls back on its basis. Twice the Axis and twice the Allied forces, Allied forces found that after huge advances they were so over-extended that an enemy counterattack meant not a limited a withdrawal to a defensive position, but a precipitate retreat across the bulge of Cyrenaica where every possible defensive position was vulnerable to outflanking moves.

5. Ultimately, the victor in the desert war would be the side, which got the most and best supplies in the shortest time. On both occasions that Romel began his great advances, Axis domination of the centre of the Mediterranean had meant that his forces had received adequate fuel and equipment. But by the time the Afrika Korps reached El Alamei, Eighth Army had never been better placed despite its apparent perilous position. Its supply lines were only 70 miles long and it was receiving petrol equipment in unprecedented quantities. Rommel was now 370 miles from even his most forward base at Tobruk, and Allied domination of the sea and air meant that few supplies were even getting across the Mediterranean sea., Let alone forward to his troops. Also, Rummel had an additional problem of supplies.

The enormous demands of the German armies fighting in Russia meant that little new material could be spread for what meant at Supreme Headquarters increasingly saw as a sideshow, a successful but nonetheless basically peripheral campaign far away from the truly vital fronts. In contrast, the Western Allied had now accepted that their first major thrust against the Axis must come from the Mediterranean, and Eighth Army, as the means of clearing the North African shore, was receiving the pick of the new equipment available.

6. When the Allied broke through at El Alamein, it was inevitable that Rommel would have to fall back at least as far as El Agheila where Eighth Army had twice been halted. But the Allied landing in Algeria and their advance into Tunisia introduced a new factor not just Rommel's lines of communication but his very bases were directly threatened. He had to fall right back to protect them, and it is a measure of the supply difficulties that they encountered that Eighth Army's pursuit was so slow and tentative.

7. The war in North Africa fell into three distinct phases. In the first Wavell, though against desperately long odds, had very much the better of the Italians. Major General O'Connor's brilliant offensive, the first of Allied victories, had a very important moral effect.

8. The second phase was the Rommel era, whose opening coincided with Wavell's starved, but unavoidable campaign in Greece. It was a phase when the British had important successes, but when, on the whole, the Axis succeeded in baffling their opponents, and delivering telling blows such as the capture of Tobruk, British generals of real distinction, Wavell,

Cunningham, and Auchinleck were unable to master the redoubtable Rommel.

9. Rommel was a very stylish corps commander with splendid qualities of leadership. Of him, Hecheim writes; "I frequently took over the command of the assault forces myself and seldom in Africa was I given such a hard fought struggle." The fact is that he was still the ardent platoon and company commander who had so greatly distinguished himself in the First World War. In most armies a corps commander who exposed himself in such fashion would be roundly condemned by the pundits.

10. In phase three, with Alenxader as Commander in Chief in the Middle East and Montgomery in command of Eighty Army, the tide quickly changed against the Axis. The defensive battle of aam Halfa, followed, when he was ready, by the battle from which Viscount Montgomery took his title, marked the turn of the tide. As Winston Chuchill put it not without a measure of exaggeration, "before Alamei we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat". But the end in Africa did not come quickly. Despite the landings in North Africa, OPREATION TORCH, which began only four days after the successful conclusion of El Alamein, the Germans and Italians succeeded in holding out until 1943.

11. Once Montgomery had taken over, Eighty Army changed its style completely. Its new commander was swift to detect its strengths and weaknesses, and was severely critical of its state of training. Most commanders, he thought, "had come to the fore by skill in fighting and because no better were available: many were above their ceiling, and few

were good trainers. The Eighty Army had suffered eighty thousand casualties since it was formed, and little time had been spent in training the replacements. 'When one recalls that O'Connor had began his offensive with 30,000 men, one can appreciate the magnitude of the problem. Battle experience is in itself a form of training, and Eighty Army had seen plenty of fighting. On the other hand no battle is like the one before, and soldiers are all too prone to draw general tactical rules from their own particular experience. That can be a dangerous snare for the unwary, for the truth is that every military problem whether strategic or logistics, must be treated on its own merits, the factors analyzed, and the plan made regardless of preconceived ideas and prejudices.

12. Compared to Romell, Montgomery was altogether less of a paradigm; more the professional. General Eisenhower, who knew him better than most wrote; *“General Montgomery was, a superior in two important characteristics; he quickly developed among British enlisted men an intense devotion and admiration- the greatest personal asset a commander can possess. Montgomery’s other outstanding characteristics is his tactical ability in what might be called the “prepared” battle... He is careful, meticulous and certain.”* The British soldier who fought under Montgomery soon came to believe that, whilst they served under him, they simply could not be beaten. It was not that they considered themselves supermen. It was just that they credited him with knowing everything, caring for their welfare, and thanks to expert co-ordination of the various arms and services, and reducing their casualties to the minimum. In July, 1947, Hitler gave it as his personal opinion that the protected defence of Tunisia postponed the invasion of Europe by six months and kept Italy in the Axis. It cost the Axis

250,415 men, counting only prisoners of war, It was Hitler's view that without the prolonged resistance in North Africa, the Allied would have been able to land in Italy unopposed and push forward to the Brenner, at a time when Germany as a result of Stalingard would not have had a single man available to put there. His argument is totally unconvincing. The men and tanks he lost in Tunisia could have been deployed to very much greater advantage for the defence of Sicily and Italy.

14. The Campaign in North Africa ended in a triumph for the Allies, and not just for the Americans who emerged with an army greatly improved in tactical efficiency. By fighting in North Africa, where they could not deploy anything like their full strength, the Germans presented the Allies with a substantial victory, at a time when they were building up their forces for the invasion of Europe. The British and Americans gained invaluable experience in North Africa that became useful elsewhere during World War 2. To have attempted the invasion of Italy or Normandy with inexperienced troops and commanders was foolhardy.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE MODULE**

15. At the end of this module, the candidate should be able to:
- a. Identify the reasons, remote and immediate, for the war in North Africa.
  - b. Examine the belligerents' aims, strategies and tactics as well as their various plans.
  - c. Review the course of the campaign and the parts played by some field commanders.
  - d. Highlights how policy decisions were made and their impact o

the campaign.

e. Identify reasons for the successes and failures of the battles of the campaign including the lessons learnt.

f. Identify the impact and consequences of the campaign on later international relations and policies.

### **CAUSES OF THE WAR**

16. **Remote Causes.** Most of the remote causes of World War II (WWII) can be traced to after effects of World War I (WW I). They are summarized as follows: simply could not be beaten. It was not that they considered themselves superman. It was just that they credited him with knowing everything, caring for their welfare, and thanks to expert co-ordination of the various arms and service, and reducing their casualties to the minimum.

13. In July, 1973, Hitler gave it as his opinion that the protracted defence of Tunisia postponed the invasion of Europe by six months and kept Italy in the Axis. It cost the Axis 250,415 men, counting only prisoners of war. It was Hitler's view that, without the prolonged

a. The Second World War could be safely described as a continuation to the First World War. Like the WW I, WW II was basically a European War involving the same opposing sides ie Britain and France against Germany.

b. Secondly, the issue of the colonies acquired by these countries was still a source of conflict. Thirdly, Germany was simply out to correct the injustices of the terms and conditions imposed on it by Britain and France after the World War. The terms of the settlement

of the First World War were:

- (1) Germany was to pay reparation for war damages in Belgium and France.
- (2) Germany lost Alsace-Lorraine and Schleswig.
- (3) Germany's Navy was to be handed over to Britain for Germany was deprived of all her colonies.
- (4) Germany had to surrender the stocks of her war materials to the Allies and gave up the territory west of River Rhine.
- (5) Germany was disarmed and her military was put under the supervision of the Allies.

c. Germany was however able to overcome the restrictions and rebuild for the following reasons:

- (1) Most of the provisions of the settlement, reparation, disarmaments, etc could not be carried out without Germany's full cooperation.
- (2) Germany was unable to pay the reparation because her economy was battered.
- (3) The plan for Germany to withdraw east of the Rhine was not carried out.
- (4) Germany trained officers secretly, ensuring that with the limited numbers of the force allowed; mainly officers and NCOs were trained. It was therefore easy to expand her military at the appropriate time.
- (5) Germany was left united with all her potential manpower development resources intact.

(6) A strong and charismatic leader emerged in the person of Adolf Hitler who personified Germany's ambition.

(7) Germany had a population of 65 million and the economic resources for power including coal and steel.

(8) The weakness of the League of Nations accounting for its inability to enforce the condition on Germany.

17. **Immediate Causes.** The immediate causes of the Second World War could be highlighted as follows:

- a. The absorption of Austria by Germany in March 1938.
- b. The absorption of the Sudetan District of Czechoslovakia by Germany in October 1938.
- c. The "Liberation" of the city of Danzig which was inhabited mainly by Germans.
- d. The German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the declaration of war by Britain and France on Germany.

18. **Aftermath of the War**

- a. The emergence of the United Nations as another world body to ensure world peace.
- b. Emergence of USA and USSR as the two world powers which elicited the development of the cold war.
- c. The split of Germany into East and West to prevent her resurgence again. They have however since reunited.
- d. The emergence of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the WARSAW PACT. The WARSAW PACT is also no

more inexistence.

- e. The emergence of independent countries from the former colonies in Africa and elsewhere.

### **GEOGRAPHY OF NORTH AFRICA**

19. North Africa comprises the land area bounded in the north by the Mediterranean Sea, in the south by the Sahara Desert, on the west, the Atlantis Ocean and in the east by the Red Sea. It could be divided into 2 distinct regions viz:

- a. North West Africa comprising Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. This area is generally reffered to as all BATBARY STATES.
- b. The North East Africa, comprising Libya and Egypt.

20. The Dominion relief, the Atlas system could be broken into two main mountains belts: the Tell Atlas and the plateau of shots in Moroccao, the Tell Atlas curves away northwards as the Riff Mountain while the Great Atlas falls Southwest. The Sahara could be divided into here broad features:

- a. The coastal strips or coastal plain.
- b. The main mountain chains.
- c. The Sahara region in the South.

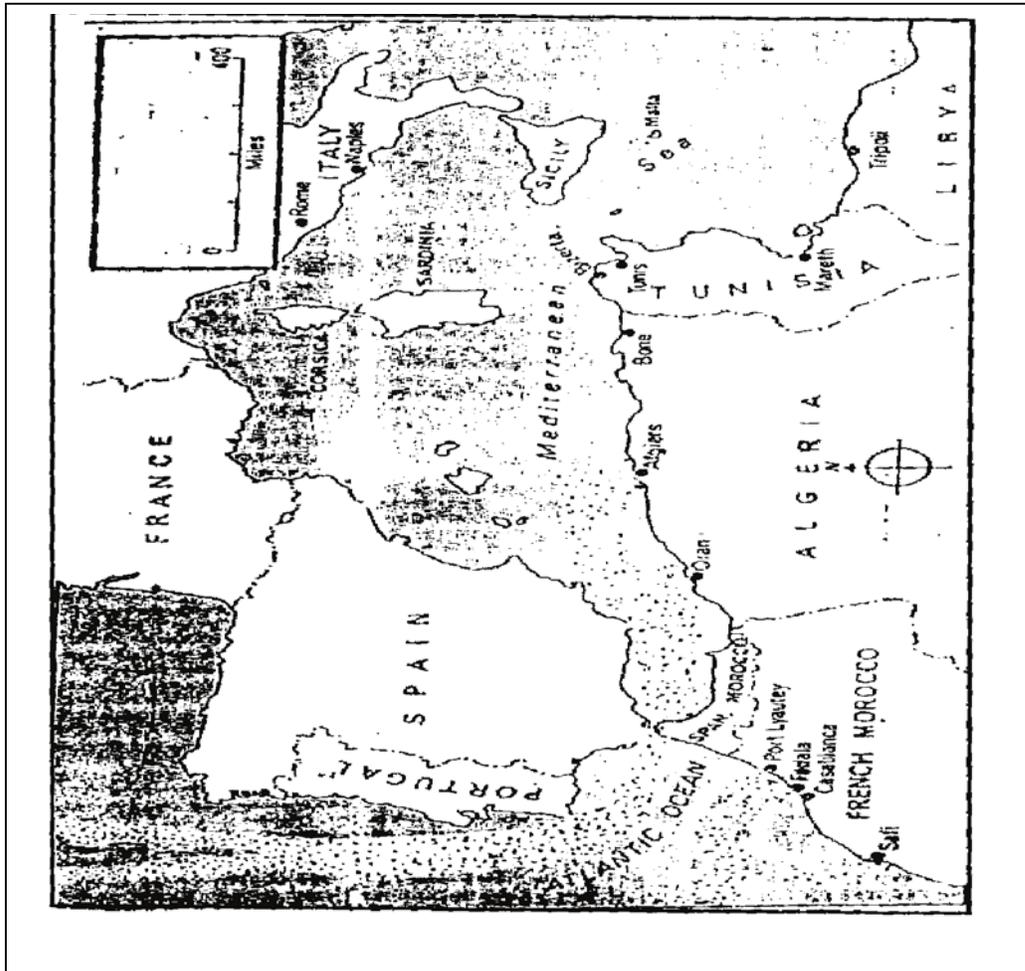
21. The rain bearing winds come from the west across the Atlantic Ocean and South West wind from the coast of West Africa penetrate inland to give some rain to the area.

22. **Morocco**. An Old Islam Empire, Morocco is governed by an absolute monarch who appoints the prime Minister. In 1912 France established a protectorate to cover the greater part of Morocco while Spain

rule the Northern part of the tangier. The National port is only 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> hours by steamer from Gilberalter. An international committee of European powers and the United States controlled Morocco. She produces barley, wheat, olives and vine, and her grassland is used for raising cattle. Phosphate, iron ore, manganese and silver are mined. The chief town and capital id Casablanca.

23. **Algeria.** Algeria was a French colony and generally called “France in Africa.” The population is about 10 million. She grows vine and rears sheep. Chief exports are wine, sheep, oil and iorn ore.

24. **Libya** A former Italian colony, Libya covers about 1.8m square kilometers of land area with 2.9 million population. Her chief export includes special groundnut, olive oil, hides and skins, castor oil seeds, and petroleum. Libya’s chief towns are Tripoli and Benghazi. It is almost a desert but for its narrow coastal plains.

**FIGURE 1: MAP OF NORTH AFRICA**

25. **Tunisia** Tunisia is small in size with about 4 million inhabitants. Formerly a French colony, it became independent in 1956.

26. **Egypt** Egypt has a land area of about 1.1 million square kilometers and a population of about 40 million. Its fertile parts include the Nile Valley and its delta. These are watered by canals that make use of the flood waters of the Nile River. Crops such as cotton, maize, wheat, barley and beans are produced. (The desert is on the East of Egypt). Some phosphates and oil are

obtained in the Gulf of Suez and Sinai. Egypt became independent in 1922 from the British who maintained troops to guard the Suez Canal and maintain other privileges until 1956. Cairo is the capital. Within Egypt lies the Suez Canal, the singular most important strategic asset of Britain. The significance of the Suez Canal is as follows:

- a. The Suez Canal lies in the Egyptian territory cutting through a flat strip of desert. The canal was built by a French Engineer, De Lesseps, and completed in 1869. It is 104 miles long. (At its northern end is Port Said, and in the south is Suez on the Gulf of Suez Canal) which was owned by the Suez Canal Company and in which the British and French governments owned shares, but was nationalized by Egypt in 1956.
- b. The Suez Canal is economically important because it provides a sea route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean thereby shortening the journey between Europe, India, the far East and Australia.
- c. The journey between Port Said and Suez saves ships traveling between Kuwait about 6,400kms and between London and Bombay 6,600kms. Tolls are collected from ships that use the canal by Egyptian authority. It should be noted that India, Australia and other countries in the Far East were either British colonies or affiliated to Britain.
- d. The Suez Canal became increasingly important with the exportation of crude oil from the Persian Gulf area to Western Europe, including Britain. In fact 75% of ships using the Canal are oil tankers. The remaining 25% carry oil seeds, foodstuff, cereals and tea.

Manufactured goods including railway equipment and machinery from Europe destined for the far East, and cement and fertilizer from Australia also pass through the Suez Canal.

27. **Sudan Republic** Until 1956, the Sudan was administered by the British as Anglo Egyptian Sudan under a Governor General on behalf of Britain and Egypt. This condominium (of administration was setup in 1899 after the overthrow by British troops of Mahdi Movement Islamic Sect. Sudan's population is about 12.5million and predominantly Arab. It's capital city is Khartoum. Suda produces crops such as millet, citrus fruits and mangoes, and minerals like iron ore, copper, manganese and salt. The Sudan is the largest country in Africa covering about 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> million square kilometers but it is land locked.

28. **Boundaries of the Sahara** It is not easy to describe the boundaries of the Sahara region. However, in the south, the 15" isoyet, natural vegetation increases in luxuriance into the true Savannah. The 10" isoyet marks its northern limit.

29. **Surface Features.** Its features affect military operations. Generally, the region varies high dissected plateaus to marginal depressions, for example the Bodele depression to the south of Tibesti. An exposed section of the crystalline basement plateau runs northwards from fur Highlands near the borders of the North by the air and Tessili Plateau. Tibesti the central plateau is dissected by enormous gorges revealing impressive crystalline and volcanic rock thrust into it in some places. Around the central massif, extending from northern Egypt Westwards through Libya,

Masia, Algeria, Mauritania and Mali towards Chards and Bodele there are depressions. Part of the depressions is below sea level. The relief of the Sahara could be broadly divided into three:

- a. The erg or sandy desert.
- b. The reg or stony desert.
- c. The Hamada or Rock Desert. The Weathering of the rocks in the deserts is by extreme temperature variations-very hot in the day time and very cold at night. The weathered rocks and sand are removed by wind action, and deposited as Erg or Reg.

30 **Climate.** The climate of the Sahara is harsh for man and animals. It is arid, with very high temperatures in the day-(136 F was recorded in 1922 at El-Aziz near Tripoli) and night fogs are common with very low night temperatures.

31 **People.** The desert people are either of the Hamitic or Semitic race. They are found settled around the oasis.

32. **Water Supply.** Underground water is the main source of water supply, either boreholes or wells. In the well developed aquifers, Egyptians make use of River Nile as the source of water supply.

33. **Minerals.** Coal, manganese, copper, phosphates and crude oil are found. Crude oil, iron ore are present in large quantities. Oil reserves have been found in the Atlas region of Algeria.

### **SITUATION BEFORE THE CAMPAIGNS**

34. **Italy.** Mussolini and his Fascist party had come to power and were determined to revive the Italian greatness of old. Italy's great achievements from the day of the Roman Empire were re-echoed and Italian nationalism emphasized. Italy had earlier in the century colonized Libya and parts of East Africa. With the defeat of France in June 1940, Italy joined Germany and declared war against Britain. Germany's spectacular successes in Europe spurred Italy to seek out areas to establish its own global supremacy as an equal power worthy of Germany's alliance. The only two areas where this ambition could be realized were Greece, a neighbouring country, and North Africa where Italy already had a major presence. Italy's adventure in Greece immediately proved disastrous; it therefore turned its attention to North Africa.

a. **Strategy** Mussolini had always asserted that Italy was held "prisoners" in North Africa by the British forces in Egypt and East Africa. Italy's aim was therefore to seize Egypt and the Suez Canal by a pincer movement from Libya on the west and from Ethiopian and the Italian Somaliland on the South East, Italy wanted to secure the whole of North Africa from Libya to Egypt and so also secure the North Mediterranean Shore opposite Egypt by invading Greece, through Albania. After its misadventure in Greece, Italy decided to invade Egypt.

b. **Disposition.** Italy had troops in Libya and East Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somaliland.)

(1) **Forces in Libya.** The Italians had 250,000 men under Marshal Graziani and sizeable Airforce and Navy, although

most of its equipment were obsolete.

(2) **Forces in East Africa.** The Italians had a total of 300,000 troops including natives under the Duke of Aosta.

(3) **Organisation.** The Italians Army was organized into nine infantry divisions of 13,000 men each, three Blackshirt Armour Divisions and two (native) African Infantry Divisions.

35. **Germany.** Germany had no initial intention of any involvement in North Africa. It had no colony there and perceived the war as a short “Blitzkrieg” war aimed at quickly humbling its adversaries, Britain and France.

a. **Strategy.** Germany’s strategy was simply to assist Italy as an ally; Hitler feared that if Italy lost North Africa, it would opt out of the war leaving Germany on its own.

b. **Disposition.** Germany had no forces in North Africa.

36. **Britain** Britain had Egypt as a colony where Suez Canal formed the strategic link for shipping and trade from Europe to the Far East. The great oil fields, which lay to, the east of the Suex Canal in the Middle East was also in Britain’s hands. Britain therefore considered it vital to hold Egypt at all cost.

a. **Strategy.** The British strategy therefore was outlined by General Wavell who was then the Commander in Chief Middle East. The strategy aimed at defending Egypt and other Middle East interest, take measures to enable Britain and her allies to dominate the Mediterranean at the earliest moment and take counter offensive

against Germans in Eastern and South Eastern Europe.

b. **Disposition.** General Sir Archibald Wavell's Middle East Command had 36,000 troops in Egypt, 9,000 troops in Sudan, 5,500 troops in Kenya, 1,475 troops in British Somaliland, 27,500 troops in Asden and 800 troops in Cyrus. There was a small Airforce, but a strong Navy, which included an aircraft carrier.

c. **Organisation.** The troops in the desert were organized into one Armour Division, one Infantry Division, two Infantry Brigades and a Tank regiment.

37. **France.** After the collapse of France, 2 groups emerged, the Free French, which joined the Allies and the Vichy French, which joined the Axis forces. The Free French under General Charles De Gualle fought with the 8 Army whereas the French colonies in North African were under Vichy control.

38. **United State of America (USA).** The United States of America, before the beginning of the North African Campaign, was not involved in the war; USA therefore had no strategy for this region. She later on though would join the Allies and play a significant role in the campaign.

39. **Union of the Socialist soviet Republics (USSR).** The USSR was concerned mainly with defending its territory against the huge numbers of German forces that invaded in June 1940. The Soviets main concern was fore the Allies to open a second front against the Germans in order to relieve the pressure on the Russian front. The North African campaign affected the outcome of the Russian campaigns for the Germans.

**AN OVER VIEW OF THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN**

40. **Italy's First Offensive.** With the fall of France in June 1940, Italy joined the Germany forming the Axis forces and declared war on Britain. In pursuance of its aim of linking its Libyan forces under marshal Graziani with its force in East Africa under the Duke of Aosta, it decided to invade Egypt capturing the town of Sidi Barrani by the night fall of 16 September. The Italians then halted and began building a series of defensive camps in order to fortify their position. The North Africa Campaign had thus began.

41. **British Counter Offensive.** On 9 December 1940, the British forces under General O'Connor launched a counter- offensive against the Italian fortifications at Sidi Barrani. The town was taken and the Italian troops were pursued across North Africa for 500 miles to F.I. Agheila where the Italia troops now under General Ben Genzari surrendered to the British forces.

42. **Arrival of Rommel and His Offensive.** With the surrender of the Italian forces in North Africa, Hitler quickly dispatched a large armoured force under the command of General Erwin Rommel wasted no time and within a week of his arrival was on the offensive. His bold and swift tactics overwhelmed the British forces under General Naeme that by the end of March he had the whole British forces surrounded at the coastal town of Tobruk.

43. **The siege of Tobruk.** Rommel's forces had advanced up to the

town of Sollum, but dare not go any further with Tobruk not taken care of at his rear. Tobruk was attacked time again without success. The British and Australia Division under command of the General L. Morsehead fought well and were continuously being re-supplied through the port of Tobruk by sea. Rommel having lost so much men and equipment had ceased the attacks, dug in and held his position while awaiting re-supply.

44. **British Counter Attacks.** As a result of Churchill's constant pressure, the British C-in-C in the Middle East, General Wavell, attacked Rommel's position at Sollum. Its OPERATION BREVITY aimed to capture the passes of Sollum and Halajaya failed. OPERATION BATTLEAXE aimed to link the 8 Army east of Sollum and the garrison at Tobruk also failed.

45. **Operation Crusader.** After the failure of OPERATION BATTLEAXE in June, Churchill removed Wavell as C- in C Middle East and replaced him with General Sir Claude Auchinleck, and General Cunningham was appointed commander of the 8 Army. Both forces had worn themselves down so badly that there were to be no more offensive until November when both sides had received fresh supplies and equipment. On 18 November the Allied forces launched Operation Crusader which planned to destroy German forces, relieve Tobruk and push Rommel and his Axis forces back into Tripolitania. Fierce fighting ensued for a week until on 25 November, after heavy losses and insufficient supplies Rommel withdrew. The Allied troops pursued Rommel and by January 1942 the two forces were in exactly the same position as they were one year before when Rommel had first arrived in North Africa.

46. **Rommel's Second Offensive.** Rommel having been re-supplied with fresh troops and equipment began the second offensive on 20 January along the coast through Benghazi and the other dashing across the desert through Michili. The speed and boldness of Rommel caused panic and confusion in the Allied defences. By 6 February 1942 the 8 Army were back at the Gazala Bir Hacheim line west of Tobruk where two months earlier Rommel had been force to abandon. The Allied forces had once again been routed by a smaller but much more superior fighting force.

47. **The Battle of Gazala and the Fall of Tobruk.** Operations against the Gazala line Allied position commenced on 29 May. Rommel's main attack came to the south of Bir Hacheim and then turned north and northwest. It was well designed to outflank the main defenses of trhe Allies. Heavy fighting took place for several days until finally after suffering heavy casualties the Allies withdrew from Gazala line position on 13 June 1942. Rommel's forces now closed on Tobruk once again surrounding the city for the second time. However, this time Rommel found that Tobruk defences were not as well fortified as the previous year and by 21 June 1942 Tobruk had fallen to the Axis forces. Rommel was promoted to Field Marshal by Hitler.

48. **Pursuit to El-Alamein Line.** Having captured tremendous stocks of petroleum, supplies and vehicles, Rommel decided to pursue the withdrawing 8 Army determined not to allow it any respite. Auchinleck now in personal command of the 8 Army decided to make a stand at El-Alamein only 96kms away from Alexandria. The stenght of the El-Alamein line was that it could

not be outflanked. On 1 July Rommel launched vigorous attacks on the El-Alamein position in an effort to break through and by 5 July the attacks stalled, and were called off. On 26 July, Auchinleck attempted a counter attack on Rommel, unfortunately it did not succeed. In August 1942, Auchinleck was replaced by General Alexander as C-in-C and General Montgomery appointed as Commander 8 Army.

49. **The Battle of Alam El-Halfa.** On the night of 30/31 August Rommel struck once again. However, as a result of the extensive mine fields and depth of the defence, Rommel's momentum soon fizzled out. Montgomery then launched a heavy counterattack. Although the Axis forces fought fiercely they eventually had to withdraw on 4 and 5 September. Thus ended the Battle of Alamel Halfa. The Battle was significant as the 8 Army had fought the first battle under its new commander General Montgomery.

50. **The Battle of El-Alamein.** By October 1942 the Allied forces received massive supplies of fuel, equipment and tanks. On the other hand Rommel had over stretched his lines of communication and his supplies seriously depleted. On the night of October 23, 1942 Montgomery struck. Rommel quickly returned from Germany where he was on sick leave. It took the 8 Army eleven days of hard fighting to win the battle of Alamein and break out through the Axis defences. The battle ended just four days before the Anglo-american Expeditionary Force under General Eisenhower landed in French North Africa (Operation Torch).

51. **Operation Torch.** On 8 November 1942, a forth night after the launching of the Allied offensive on Rommel's position at El Alamein the

Allies landed at the other end of the North Africa coast. Hitler quickly dispatched troops to Libya to face the new threat. Meanwhile, Montgomery continued advancing westward in pursuit of Rommel. The Allied landing was code named Operation Torch and consisted of British and American Divisions under the command of General Eisenhower. The forces were divided into three task forces with each landing in Casablanca, Oran and Algiers respectively. With this landing the Allied were poised to close on the Axis forces from both the West and East Simultaneously.

52. **The Last Phase of the Campaign.** By February 1943 the Axis forces had been boxed in, in an area around Tunis. Rommel fell sick and had been taken to North Africa but not before inflicting a heavy blow on the Americans at Kesserine Pass. On 13 May 1942 the Axis forces surrendered to the Allies to bring an end to the North Africa Campaign.

### **IMPORTANT EVENTS**

53. **The following were the important events:**

- a. 13 September 1940 - Fall of Sidi Barrani to Italian Forces.
- b. 9 December 1940 - Recapture of Sidi Barrani by British.
- c. 7 February 1941 - Italian Forces under General Ber Genzori surrendered to the British Forces under Gen O'Connor.
- d. 12 February 1941 - Rommel and the Deutsche Africa Corps arrived in Tripoli North Africa.
- e. 24 March 1941 - Rommel launched full offensive against

British Forces.

- f. 15 June 1941 - British offensive, OP BATTLE AXE.
- g. 18 November 1941 - British offensive, OP CRUSADER.
- h. 6 June 1942 - Fall of Tobruk.
- i. 30/31 August 1942- German offensive, the battle of Alam El Halfa.
- j. 12/22 October 1942 - British offensive, the Battle of Alam El Halfa.
- k. 8 November 1942 - Allied landing in French North Africa (OP TORCH).
- l. 14 February 1943 - German offensive, Battle for the Kesserine Pass.
- m. 20 March 1943 - Allied offensive, the Battle of Mareth.
- n. 13 May 1943 - Axis forces surrendered- End of North African Campaign.

### **MAJOR LESSONS**

54. Desert warfare is similar to Naval Warfare where the destruction of the forces is the major aim not the physical occupation of an area. Battles were fought in wide open spaces where emphasis was on speed and manoeuvre of concentrated integrated forces directed at the weak points of the enemy defences.

55. The overriding importance of Logistics in Desert Warfare is well

brought out where mechanized forces are involved. Battles were lost and won in accordance with the logistics support available.

56. Application of the principles of war in winning battles was brought out clearly in the battles.

57. The enormous influence commanders have on their men was well illustrated in the North Africa Campaign. Rommel as an individual, instilled confidence in his men and fear in the enemy. The influence Montgomery, as a commander, had on the 8 Army was also exceptional.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

## **THE BATTLE OF SIDI BARRANI**

1. **BACKGROUND.** The Italian forces under Marshal Graziani in pursuance of Mussolini's strategy of controlling the North Africa coast invaded Egypt and took the town of Sidi Barrani. The British, as a result lost the advance airfield at Sidi Barrani denying refueling points for allied aircraft. British Hurricane aircraft could therefore no longer reach Malta and Allied ships no longer enjoyed fighter protection to Bardia. The Italian thus inherited those advantages, which the British lost. The Italians also now threatened British strategic plan of protecting the Suez Canal and thus the British were compelled to plan the counter attack and push the Italians back. The North Africa Campaign thus began.

2. **Forces Involved.**

a. **British Forces.** The British forces were under the command of General O'Connor and consisted of the following:

- (1) One Arm'd Division.
- (2) One Infantry Division.
- (3) 4 Infantry Brigades.

3. **British Plan.** General O'Connor adopted an orthodox plan that would take advantage of disposition of the Italian positions. The Italian camps were located at wide distances from each other and could therefore not provide mutual support. The assaulting troops consisting of the 7 Royal Tank Regiment and a Brigade of 4 Indian Division, which would advance in between the camps, Nibeiba and Sofafi positioning themselves at the rear or west of the enemy's position. & Armoured would advance along the south

flank and protect these moves, then when 4 Indian Division and advances against Sidi Barrani, they would disrupt enemy communications and finally exploit northwest or south.

4. **Conduct.** On 7 December 1940 at dusk, the move began through the gaps between the fortified box defences. On the morning of 8 December, the assaulting troops halted for petrol and rest. The Nibeiwa camp was a mile from their assembly point and was rectangular, a mile wide, a mile again as long. Defences entrenched were everywhere except in the Northwest corner. At 0700 hours on 9 December the British attacked with tanks closely supported by artillery. The Italians were completely taken by surprise, the assaulting forces poured through the Northwest undefended corner and the fort fell to the British. Timmar and Sidi Barrani fell next. At the neighbouring defended fortifications, the Italians finding the British at their rear abandoned the other Sofafi-rabia and Khur-samalus camps. What had began as a raid turned into a great victory. Two Italian Corps had been broken, nearly 40,000 prisoners taken with 73 tanks and 237 guns. The British had lost 600 men.

5. **Reasons for British Success.** General O'Connor's success at Sidi Barrani could be attributed to the following:

- a. Accurate intelligence of the Italian disposition.
- b. His ability to infiltrate the enemy from the rear and achieving complete surprise.
- c. Concentrating his force and engaging the enemy's defences piecemeal without the other Italian forces providing mutual support.
- d. Good close fire support from the artillery.

- e. Italian defences located too far apart to provide mutual support.
  - f. Applying the appropriate concept of strong static fortification for defence in Desert Warfare, which requires mobile and flexible defences. The forts could easily be outflanked.
6. **LESSONS**
- a. Forces must be able to provide mutual support.
  - b. Covering force necessary in defence to give early warning of enemy's activities to avoid being surprised.
  - c. Strong mobile reserve is necessary for counterattack tasks.
  - d. Holding ground is not as important as manoeuvre in desert warfare.



## CHAPTER THREE

### ROMMEL'S FIRST OFFENSIVE

1. **Background.** On Friday 7 February 1941 General Ben GenZari who had replaced Marshal Graizani, surrendered to O'Connor who had advanced up to El Aghaila with infantry along the desert and armour along the coastal roads. Within 62 days a force of not more than 2 Divisions had advanced 72kms and destroyed 10 Divisions of enemy forces taking 13,000 prisoners of war, 380 tanks and 845 guns. The British lost 500 soldiers, 1,373 wounded and 53 missing. However, Churchill had ordered Wavell and O'Connor tgo halt at El Aghaila and divert forces to Greece where at that time Churchill wanted to create a Balkan front that would compose of Greek, Yugoslavia and Turkish forces. Unknown to or ignored by British forces Hitler had dispatched a strong armoured force under the able command of German General Erwin Rommelto come to save the colony of Libya where the remaining Italian forces in North Africa were stationed. Rommel's orders from Hitler were to guarantee the defence of Tripoli and to prepare to recapture Cyrenaica.

2. **Situation on Rommel's Arrival in North Africa.** Rommel arrived in Tripoli on 12 Feb 1941. The same afternoon Rommel took a look at the ground from the air. His trip took him to Tarhuma Homs, Misurutta and Sirte. Rommel immediately ordered his forces forward to Sirte. Churchill's directives of diverting forces to Greece and O'Connor's halt at El Agheila gave Rommel the breathing space he needed meanwhile to strengthen his position. In order for Rommel to enable his forces to appear

strong and induce maximum caution from the British, he ordered his workshop to produce a large number of dummy tanks which were mounted on Volkswagen chasis for deception.

3. **Forces Involved.** Rommel's forces were to be shipped across the Mediterranean and Wavell's desert forces were now under the command of General Naeme.

a. **Allied Forces.** Allied Forces commanded by General Naeme whose task was not to hold the ground against any Axis attack but keep his forces intact, delay the enemy and inflict losses on the enemy:

- (1) 2 Armoured Division's Support at Mesa Brega.
- (2) 3 Armoured Brigade (Medium and Light tanks plus captured Italian tanks) located 5 miles north east of Mesa Brega.
- (3) Two new Brigades, 9 Australian Division, east of Benghazi.
- (4) One Indian Motor Brigade at Michili.
- (5) A third Australian Brigade in Tobruk.

b. **Axis Forces.** Axis forces commanded by Lt Gen Erwin Rommel comprising German and Italian troops. Rommel had also been told not to undertake any decisive action in Africa before 15 Panzer Division reached him in May 1941. The disposition of the Allied Forces was as follows:

- (1) German 5 Light Division.
- (2) Italian Brescia Division.
- (3) Italian Ariete Division.

(4) Flieger Korps (50 dive bombers and 20 fighter-bombers).

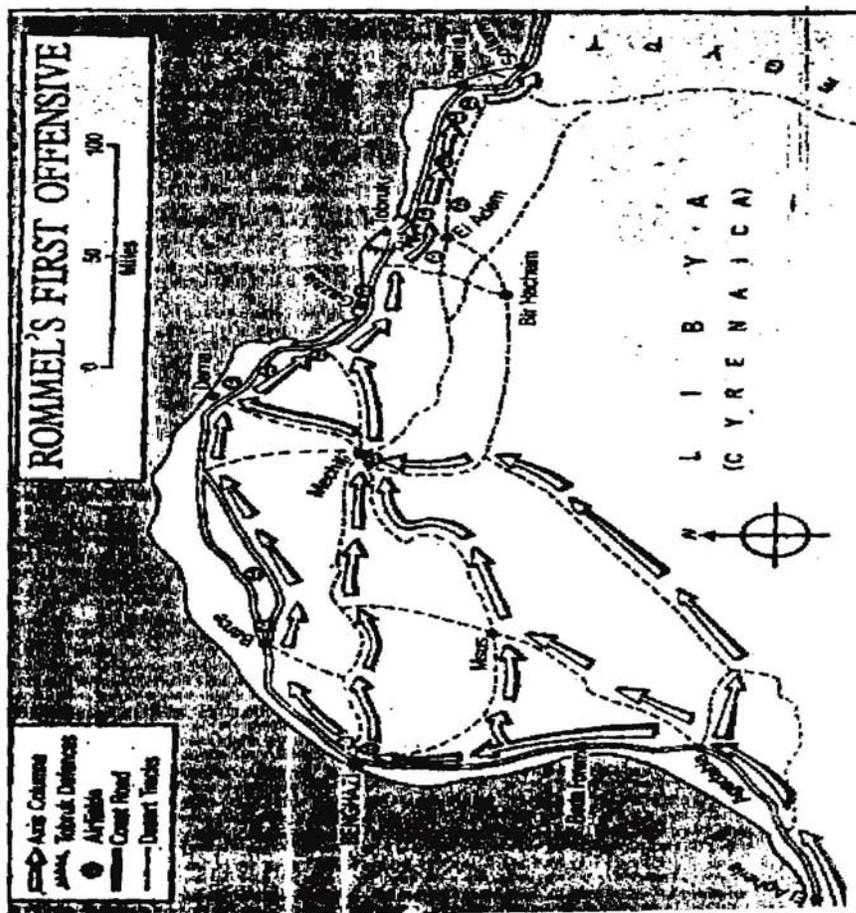
4. **Plan.** Rommel's plan was to reconnoiter and probe Allied positions in preparation for the recapture of Cyrenaica in May on arrival of the 15 Panzer Division. In pursuance of his objective, he moved his forces up to sitre and El Agheila.

5. **Conduct.** Rommel's advance came up against little resistance. His command style from the front and using his torch aircraft he flew well ahead and found that the British defences were dispersed. Rommel pursued his advance making bold use of his little army, pushing up the coast with the Brescia Division and across the desert with the Ariete and the German 5 Light Division. He drove them on at great speed in a widely dispersed small groups of all arms and then concentrating them when it mattered. German organization, doctrine and training were all peculiarly and purposely designed for just this sort of circumstance, when grouping and command could be swiftly varied at will. Rommel divides his forces and advance along three Axis from Agedebia. One force consisting of the Brescia Division along the coast to Benghazi, a second force through Msus across the desert to Michikli. The combined force of the Ariete and 5 Light Division dashed for Tobruk and on to capture the passes of Sollum and Halafaya. On the British side there seemed to be no tactical aim and they simply withdrew, 2 Armoured Division, short of petrol, harassed by enemy aircraft, contributed nothing to the battle at all, and most of the Division, including nearly all the tanks of 3 Armoured Brigade were lost. The bulk of the Australian Division, however succeeded in getting away towards Tobruk

which was soon reinforced by another Brigade. Lack of direction was made final when General Naeme during the confused retirement from his headquarters, was captured. O'Connor, who had been sent up by Wavell to advise Naeme was taken too.

6. **Reasons for Allied Failure.**

- a. Lack of clear tactical or strategies aim in deploying its defences in Cyrenaica.
- b. The Allied forces strategically miscalculated both the timing and the extent of the Axis threat in Cyrenaica and thus the defensive strength to hold the desert flanks.
- c. Confusion in British strategy. Instead of completely ousting all Italian forces from North Africa when General O'Connor had the forces and all the initiative to succeed, forces were diverted from North Africa to Greece which eventually did not serve any purpose.
- d. Interference by Churchill in Military affairs, instead of listening to Wavell who was for the continuation of O'Connor's advance decided to overrule Wavell and divert forces to Greece.
- e. Incorrect priorities by the Allied High Command.

**FIGURE 3: ROMMEL'S FIRST OFFENSIVE**

f. Over burdening of responsibilities of General Wavell. As C-in-C Middle East he had the responsibilities of not only campaign in North Africa but also the campaigns in East Africa. Later on these responsibilities would be split

g. The commander of the Allied forces General Naeme, although a highly decorated soldier knew nothing about desert warfare.

h. **Tactics.**

(1) Principles of defence violated.

- a. Defences could not provide mutual support as forces were too far dispersed to support each other.
- b. Lack of strong mobile reserve to counter attack the attacking forces at the opportune times.
- c. Defences were engaged piecemeal by Axis forces thus allowing them to achieved local superiority at each time.

(2) Superior Axis Tactics.

- (a) Correct use of combined arms with close air support.
- (b) Rommel commanding from the front and able to read the battle immediately influenced the conduct, a necessary requirement in every changing and fluid situations such as what exists in mobile warfare.
- (c). Speed and offensive action that kept the Axis forces ahead of the Allied reactions.
- (d) The efficient drill of the Germans in recovery of tanks under fire.

7. **Lessons Learnt.**

- a. The need for a clear aim before embarking on any operation.
- b. The need for a commander to command from the front of the battle field in mobile warfare to enable vital decisions to be taken at crucial moments during battle, especially in extremely fluid situations such as what exist in mobile warfare.

- c. Balanced grouping of forces to enable a force to move independently and react to any threat long enough to hold its own until reinforced.
- d. The advantage of air power in open flat ground such as the desert.
- e. The independence on supply in mechanized warfare.
- f. The similarity of desert warfare to naval warfare where the destruction of forces is more important than holding of ground or space that can always be outflanked.
- g. The importance of flexibility in command and organization to enable a force react to unforeseen situations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE SIEGE ON TOBRUK**

1. Rommel, having succeeded in pushing the Allied forces back beyond Sollum and boxing the main Allied forces in Tobruk, Rommel was under the impression that the Allies were being evacuated whereas in fact they had been made to hold Tobruk and Tobruk was actually being reinforced.

2. **Rommel's Plan.** Rommel's plan was to use the Brescia Division to attack Tobruk from the west planning to raise a cloud of dust to give the impression of a massive armour movement, thereby creating a situation that would give the impression that the attack was coming from that direction. The main attack would however be carried out by the 5 Light Division from the South East.

3. **Allied Forces.** General Wavell appointed General Morshead to command the Garrison at Tobruk and arranged that more tanks be sent there by sea. The forces in Tobruk were as follows:

- a. Six Infantry Brigades.
- b. Four Artillery Regiments.
- c. Two Anti Tank Units.
- d. 75 Anti aircraft Guns.
- e. 45 Tanks.

4. **Axis Forces.** Rommel had the remains of his Brescia Division, Ariete and 5 Light Division. They were however exhausted, but Rommel was counting on the panic and confusion that he had already caused,

following the rout he had succeeded in achieving within the allied ranks. He did not expect them to have time to prepare offensive defences.

5. Rommel attacked on 11 April, confident that the Allies were withdrawing. Once again Rommel divided his weak forces into three, he sent the 2 Machine Gun Battalion with some AA Guns and Artillery to the east flank of Tobruk to block the coast road there. The 3 Recce Unit reinforced the motorcycle combinations further eastwards in preparation of pushing on forward towards Egypt when Tobruk fell. However, Rommel's tanks were no longer in the advantageous mobile warfare situation in which they were so deadly effective. In a static situation they had to crawl painfully forward supported by infantry and advancing slowly capturing meter by meter after heavy fighting. The anti tank guns of the Allies in contrast were fighting a battle in which they were well suited and were able to pick off the Panzers one by one at close range. After several attempts and after heavy casualties, over 1,200 men killed, wounded or missing, Rommel had to call off the siege.



could easily be opened up at any point. The second defence was 2 or 3 thousand meters behind the first. Rommel did not have this vital information when he attacked.

b. The second reason was that Rommel's advance into Cyrenaica was guided by a stream of opportunities, which he cashed on. His troops were exhausted and had not arrived in force at Tobruk before the commencement of the attack. His use of tanks in close quarter battle was also a wrong tactic.

c. The Italian equipment were obsolete and were not used effectively by Rommel, using them only as a diversion.

d. Rommel's appreciation was wrong as he was under the impression that the Allies were evacuating and not re-enforcing Tobruk.

e. Tobruk could continuously be resupplied by sea. In fact a whole Division was replaced by a fresh Division right under the nose of Rommel.

## 7. LESSONS

a. A siege on a port that has a secure source of resupply and well fortified cannot be taken unless an equal and effective source of resupply is available to sustain the siege.

b. A city or town located on a coast whose navy controls the sea cannot be easily taken without at least the existence of naval parity or air superiority so as to neutralize the naval power. In other words a blockade has to be total.

c. Rommel himself has this to say in his war diary about Tobruk. " In this assault we lost more than 1,200 men, killed, wounded and

missing. This shows how sharply the curve of casualties rises when one reverts from mobile to positional warfare. In a mobile action, what counts is material, as the essential compliment to the soldier. The finest fighting man has no value in mobile warfare without tanks, guns and vehicles. Thus a mobile force can be rendered unfit for action by manpower. This is not the case with positional warfare, where the infantry man with rifle and hand grenade has lost little of his value, provided of course, he is protected by anti tank guns or obstacles against enemy's armour. For him, enemy number one is the attacking infantry man. Hence position, where everything turns on the destruction of enemy materials."

### **THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF SOLLUM AND HALFAYA PASSES**

8. Sollum and Halfaya passes were the only places where it was possible to cross the escarpment between the coast and the Habata. The escarpment stretched away from Sollum in a South Eastern direction towards Egypt. The halfaya positions gave an equal command over both possible roads. In any offensive from Egypt therefore, possession of these was bound to be of utmost value. A supply route round Habata would be extremely vulnerable.

9. Rommel thus realized that he had to recapture halfaya pass, which he eventually did. His biggest problem remained how to supply his troops via Balbia uninterrupted. At Tobruk, all troops East to Bambut had to be supplied through the open desert because:

- a. The Italian has lost prestige in the eyes of the Arabs since Grazini's defeat.

b. Italian high command was terminating all supplies at Tripoli 1,500 Kms from the front. They refused to make proper use of Benghazi. This was very serious because in the desert supplies were lifelines.

### **THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF TOBRUK**

10. Tobruk had been built by the Italians and developed into a major port with the necessary facilities to receive large quantities of supplies. Its importance was so strategic that the British refused to abandon it when Rommel was pushing the Allies out of Cyrenaica, Wavell at a conference in Cairo attended by the British Foreign Minister, decided that Tobruk would be held as a fortress, Churchill further ordered that Tobruk should be held "to death without thought of retirement". This decision proved important as the Allied forces were able to halt Rommel by denying him Tobruk which was vital to his continuously receive fresh supplies and troops uninterrupted by sea at Tobruk.

11. The importance of Tobruk can further be understood in relation to the German supply problem. The Axis forces in Libya needed about 50,000 tons of supplies each month. Tripoli was the port to which those supplies would come. Axis shipping could lift only 29,000 tons a month from Italian ports to Tripoli. It followed that any attack on Axis communications, land or sea would pay big dividends. It followed too that Malta, being in Allied hands would contribute a great deal in fulfilling this task. Tobruk's retention by the British was therefore a must. To Rommel however the capture of Tobruk, was a strike, which promised to solve his logistic problems at once.

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Tripoli supply center being 1,500km away was too far, therefore the capture of Tobruk became an obsession with Rommel and it monopolized his activities right up till the British that dislodged him in November.

**CHAPTER FIVE****THE BRITISH SUMMER OFFENSIVE**

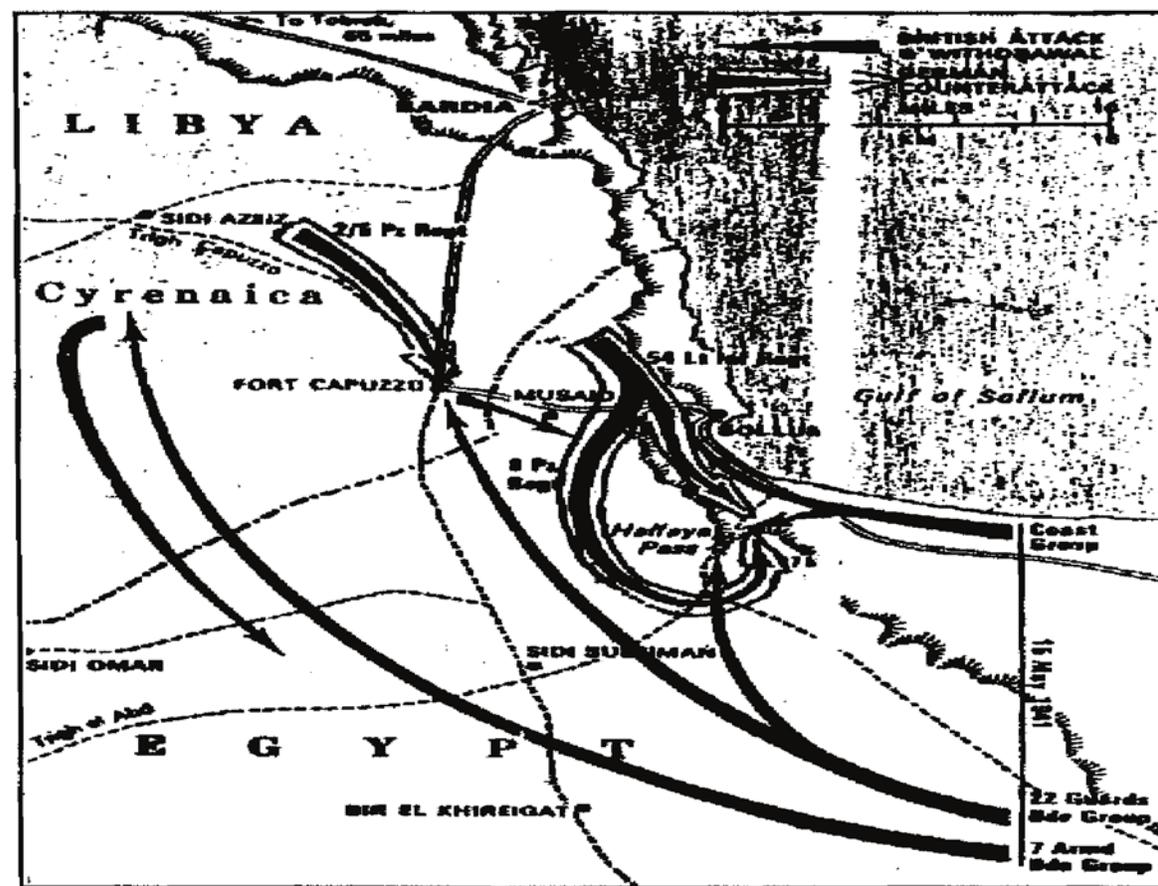
1. Throughout the months of April, May and June the war centred around the Mediterranean with both Allied and Axis forces fighting for control of this vital region for the re-supply of forces in North Africa. In May the Germans took the Island of Crete by a costly airborne assault in which they lost so many men that they never attempted an airborne assault again. Churchill was insisted on pushing Rommel out of Cyrenaica and linking the 8<sup>th</sup> Army east of Sollum with the fortress at Tobruk that he constantly pressured Wavell for an offensive.

2. Any offensive against Rommel could not be carried out without first capturing the vital passes at Sollum and Halafaya. Wavell therefore ordered General Gott now in command, to attack in the Sollum area and drive the enemy from Sollum and Capuzza and harassing him as much as possible while exploiting towards Tobruk. A successful operation of this sort would be a preliminary to the major offensive which Wavell was planning "OP BATTLE AXE" once he had been able to reconstitute 7 Armoured Division with fresh tanks. This initial plan was code named "OP BREVITY".

3. **OPERATION BREVITY.** The plan for "OP BREVITY" was for 2 Royal Tank Regiment to advance to Sidi Azeiz, the Guards Brigade and the 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade to clear the top of Halafaya pass and sieze Capuzzo and for another group to capture the lower Halafaya pass and Sollum. At first things went well and the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Tank Regiment had a quick success against the Italians at Halafaya. Surprise was achieved by

having no preliminary artillery bombardment, there were also no wire or mines to breach. The unprepared Italian defenders could not withstand the quickly pressed home attack and the objective was easily taken and the top of Halafaya pass Capture. General Gott's forces pressed onto capture Cupuzzo, however Rommel quickly counter attacked retaking Cupuzzo and pushing the Allied force back to Halafaya. Ten days later Halafaya was also lost when Rommel launched another attack thus leaving Wavell's first attempt to regain the initiative from Rommel a complete failure.

**FIGURE 5: OPERATION BREVITY**



4. **OPERATION BATTLE AXE.** General Brresford - Peirse now

replaced General Scott as Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army Churchill continued to pressure Wavell for an offensive to recapture Cyrenaica and regain the airfield that would support the forces in Malta and the royal Navy to dominate activity in the Mediterranean.

a. **Allied Plan.** The plan was for 4 Indian Division (back from East Africa) with 4 Armoured Brigade to destroy the enemy in the Bardia Sollun Halafaya Capuzzo area with 7 Armoured Division and 4 Indian Division guarding the Southeren flank. After securing the first object, 7 Armoud Division reinforced with 7 Armoured Brigade would attempt to draw enemy tanks into a desive battle. General Beresford Peirse's headquarters was to be provided while the Royal Navy would continue to supply Tobruk. The attack was to be launched on 15 June 1941.

b. **Axis Situation.** The afrika Korps was disposed to accept an attack as Rommel was expecting one. His defensive arrangements were strong with over 200 tanks.

c. **Forces**

(1) **Allied Forces.**

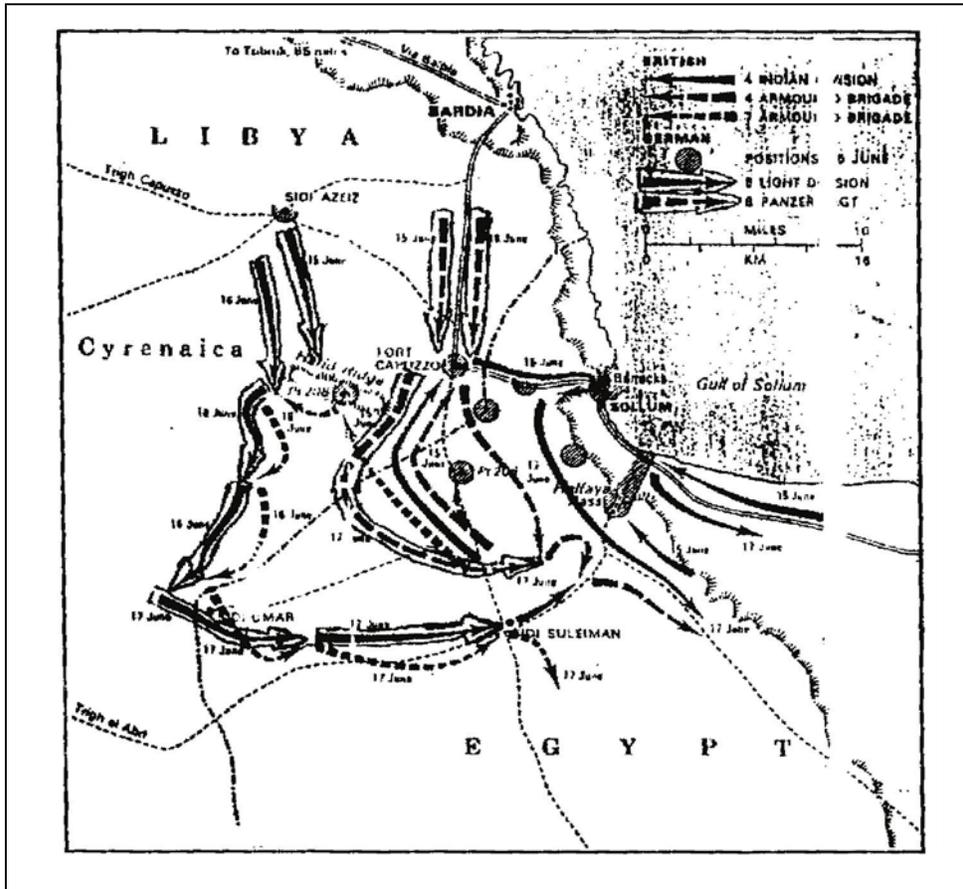
- (a) 4 Indian Division.
- (b) 7 Armoured Division.
- (c) 9 Australian Division (Tobruk).
- (d) 4 Armoured Brigade.
- (e) 7 Armoured Brigade.

(2) **Axis Forces.**

- (a) 15 Panzer Division (Fresh from Germany).

- (b) 5 Light Division.
- (c) Italian Brescia Division.
- (d) Italian Ariete Division.

**FIGURE 6: OPERATION BATTLE AXE**



d. **Conduct.** The attack was launched at 0400hrs on 15 June 1941. Unlike OP BREVITY, OP BATTLE AXE achieved no surprise. The 4 Indian Division was held up on the coast by the batteries of the famous 88mm anti aircraft guns deployed in anti-tank role. 7 Armoured Division was also held up by the same well dug in 88mm guns on the Hafid Ridge (point 208). Having halted the

Allied attack on 15 June, Rommel began his counter strokes the next morning. 15 Panzer Division was first to attack at Capuzzo against 4 Armoured Brigade. 5 Light Division which attacked 7 Armoured Division between Sidi Aziez and Sidi Suleman was more successful. Rommel now seizing his opportunity disengaged his mobile elements of 15 Panzer Division, leaving just enough forces to hold 4 Armoured Division at the Halafaya pass, and reinforced 5 Light Division to push his attack forward towards Sidi Sulemam. On the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 5 Light Division together with the reinforcements were able to break through a battered 7 Division and threatened the British rear positions. The Allied forces in order to avoid being cut off had to disengage from the attacks on Cupuzzo and Sollum and make a hasty retreat. At the end of "OP BATTLE AXE" the Western Desert force 8 Army had lost about 1,000 men and nearly 100 tanks. German casualties were fewer, 700 men and only 12 tanks destroyed. The Royal Air Force lost about 40 aircrafts.

e. **Reason for Allied Failure.**

- (1) The whole operation had been mounted too quickly. Tank crews had little time for learning to handle the new tanks and practice brigade or division operations and exercises.
- (2) The offensive had no overall aim and was conceived and launched simply to respond to the tremendous pressure by Churchill for an offensive against Rommel.
- (3) The two types of tanks, the Cruiser and the Matilda were unsuited to fight in support of each other; one was fast with good range, the other slow and restricted to 40 miles of radius.

- (4) The tanks and Infantry had not trained together.
- (5) The battle commander positioned himself so far back he was unable to properly co-ordinate the activities of his two divisions and was also inexperienced in armoured warfare.
- (6) Rommel's superior tactics of using his tanks to deal primarily with the enemy's infantry and soft vehicles, and his anti-tanks, guns and 88mm antiaircraft guns to destroy allied tanks.
- (7) The superior German doctrine of permanent integration of tanks, guns and infantry as combat teams.
- (8) The Allied tanks were inferior to the German tanks and the German were always able to recover their disabled tanks from the battle field while the Allies were not.

f. **Lessons.**

- (1) Surprise was not achieved. Rommel was prepared and expecting the Allied attack.
- (2) The Allies were unable to concentrate their forces at the weakest point of the enemy's defences.
- (3) The use of static defences was unsuitable in Desert Warfare as they could easily be out-flanked.
- (4) The need for a clear and concise aim which must be understood by down the chain of command was absent before embarking on the operation.
- (5) Military commanders are best left to carry out their military operations without political interference, Churchill did not allow this.

(6) In mobile warfare, forces must be organized with the required grouping to respond to any unforeseen situation or threat. Forces and plans must also be flexible.

(7) The advantage gained by Rommel by applying the principle of Economy of Forces and deploying just enough forces for secondary tasks while concentrating his forces on his primary objectives.

(8) Excellent co-operation between combat troops supporting arms and close air support by Axis forces.

**CHAPTER SIX****OPERATION CRUSADER**

1. **Background.** OPERATION CRUSADER was designed to destroy enemy's armoured forces, retrieve Tobruk and clear the enemy from Cyrenaica. After the failure of "OP BATTLEAXE" Churchill removed General Wavell as C-in-C Middle East and replaced him with General Claude Auchinleck. General Cunningham was also appointed to command the newly formed 8 Army. On the other hand Hitler, unfortunately for Rommel had turned his attention to "OP BABAROSA" the invasion of Russia. German resources were drawn away from the Mediterranean. Not only did this mean that the Axis forces in Libya did not receive the material needed to resume the offensive; it meant too that the British were slowly able to strengthen their air forces and armies. As usual Auchinleck was constantly under the normal pressure from Churchill to go onto the offensive.

2. **Force.**

(1) **Allied Forces.**

(a) **13 Corps**

- (i) 4 Indian Division.
- (ii) The New Zealand Division.
- (iii) A Tank Brigade.

(b) **30 Corps.**

- (i) 7 Armoured Division.
- (ii) 4 Armoured Brigade.

- (iii) 1 South Africa Division.
- (iv) A Guards Brigade.
- (c) The Division and a Tank brigade at Tobruk.
- (2) **Axis Forces.**
  - (a) 15 Panzer Division on the coast, East of Tobru.
  - (b) 21 Panzer Division on one coast, East of Tobruk.
  - (c) 90 Light Division at the frontier.
  - (d) One division at the frontier.
  - (e) Four Italian Division around Tobruk.
  - (f) One German Division around
- (3) **Tanks.** Allied forces had superiority. (724:414).
- (4) **Air.** Allied had superiority (1,100:320)

3. **Aim.** The of the alkies in “OP CRUSADER” was to destroy the enemy’s armoured forces, retrieve Tobruk and clear the enemy from Cyrenaica.

d. **Allied Plan.** General Cunningham’s plan was based on his concept of regarding the 13 Corps as basically an infantry division and the 30 Corps as an armoured division. The plan therefore was for 13<sup>th</sup> Corps to pin down the garrison at Sollum while the 30 Corps was to swing round to the South of the frontier defences occupying first, the area of Gabr Saleh, then the critical escarpment at Sidi Rezegh. By this action Cunningham expected to draw Rommel’s armoure forward and south to its destruction while 13 Corps would then breach the Axis frontier with the aim of relieving Tobruk.

e. **Conduct.** There were mainly 4 parts to the battle.

- (1) Firstly on 18 November the Allied armoured advanced

by nightfall 3 armoured brigades were in position; the 7 Brigade to the North of Gabr Saleh, the 22 Brigade to the West and the 4 Brigade to the South East. On the following day, the 7 armoured Brigade support Group reached Sidi Rezegh, whilst the 22 Armoured Brigade went off to engage the Italians at Bir el Gubi and the 4 Armour Brigade was in action east of Gebr Saleh. Rommel however, refused to believe that a major offensive had begun and therefore refused to commit his whole armour as Cunningham had expected, but; nevertheless, dispatched a part of 21 Panzer Division to engage 4 armoured Brigade. Already therefore the central theme of his own choosing with the bulk of his own armour had fallen apart. Nevertheless a series of tank battle near Sidi Rezegh ensure in which both sides suffered heavy losses. On balance, by virtue of their excellent recovery drills, the Germans had the better of it.

(2) Secondly, instead of Rommel to face the Allied armoured threat from his southern flank, he decided to attack the frontier with his armour threatening to rout 13<sup>th</sup> Corps assaults at Sidi Aziz. It was a gamble that nearly paid off, had Auchinleck not taken a personal grip of the battle and stood fast against Rommel's attacks otherwise the whole offensive would have collapsed. Cunningham was removed and replaced with General Ritchie. Rommel had to break off the attack and return to his supplies between Tobruk and Bardia.

(3) Thirdly, severe encounters between the Germans and the

new Zealanders saw Sidi Rezegh exchange hand to the Germans. However, the New Zealand Division had already managed to over run the Halafaya pass and capture Bardia.

(4) Lastly, after over 10 days fighting the Allied forces received reinforcement while the Germans did not. The Axis forces having fought continuously without rest or relief were completely exhausted. Rommel therefore decided to carry out an organized withdrawal to Agheila. Tobruk garrison was relieved on 7 December. Rommel even in withdrawing maintained offensive Action and was able to inflict further damage on allied armour. At the end of OP CRUSADER, Rommel lost 386 of 414 tanks and 3,800 men. Thus the battle which realized many of its aims was counted as an allied victory, but very heavy cost in men and materials.

## **FIGURE 7: OPERATION CRUSADER**

### f. **Reasons for Allied Success.**

(1) The allies in “OP CRUSADER” had a clear aim, to destroy Axis armour and relieve Tobruk. Although Rommel was able to escape with an effective fighting force the Allies did manage to relieve Tobruk and drive Rommel out of Cyrenaica.

(2) The main reason for the Allied success was not superior tactics, but the fact that they were able to receive reinforcements from Egypt whereas the Germans could not.

(3) General Auchinleck showed calmness and boldness in command by refusing to panic when Rommel attempted to

break through the frontier and threaten the allied rear. Auchinleck stood fast and when he saw that Cunningham was not up to the task he removed him and replaced with General Ritchie.

(4) The British also showed greater skill in tank, infantry and artillery cooperation, than before; but were still unable to concentrate their forces where and when it mattered like the Germans.

(5) The gallantry and courage of the Allied soldiers were outstanding, especially the New Zealanders.

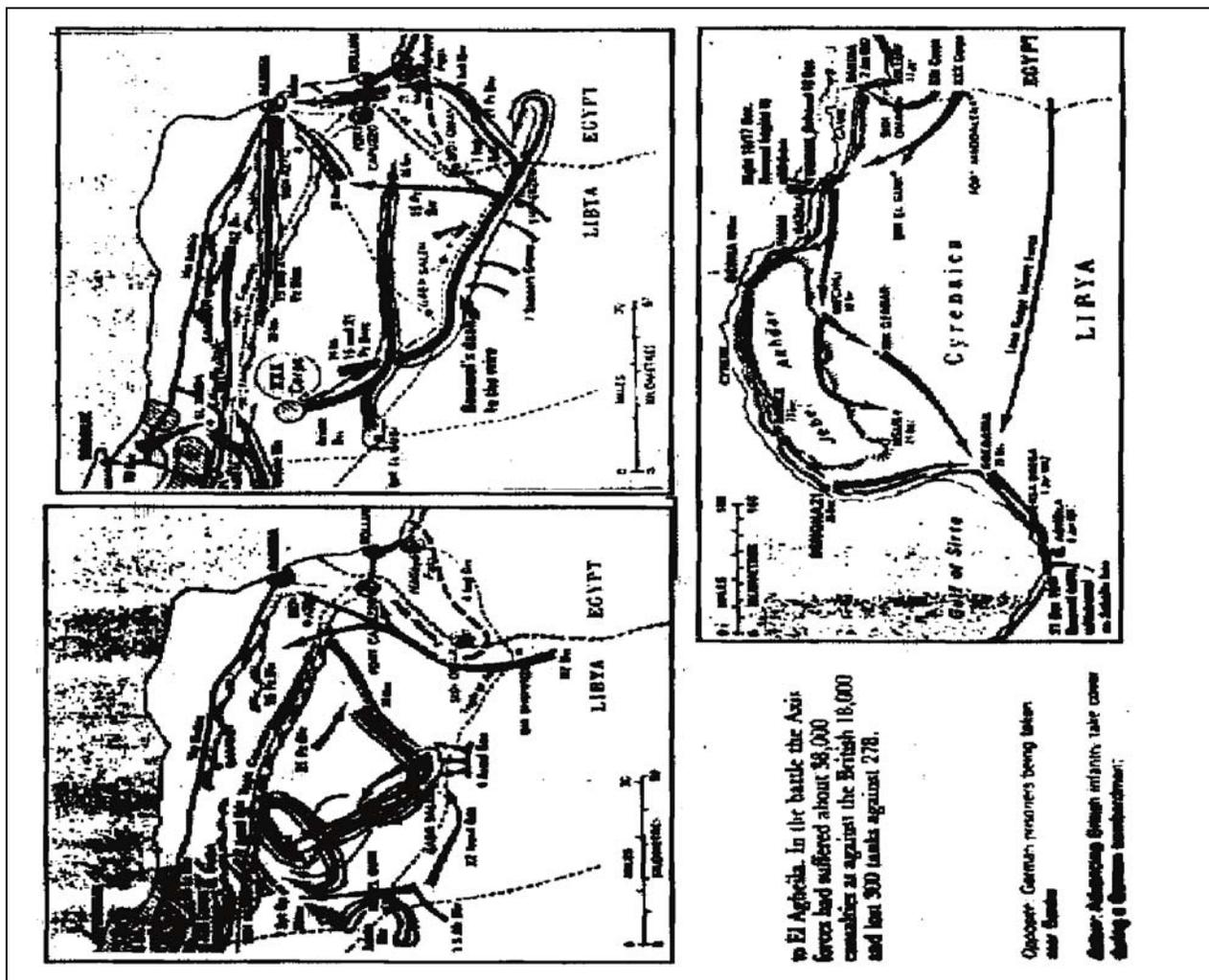
(6) The dominance of the air by the Royal Air Force and their ability to provide the required support to the ground troops.

g. **Lessons.**

(1) The need for extreme skill in handling of large forces in mobile operations.

(2) The need to appreciate command for the situation. The British command arrangements were still faulty either in mechanics or personalities. British commanders still just gave instructions and retired to the headquarters and expected the battle to go as planned.

**FIGURE 8: DETAILS OF OPERATION CRUSADER.**



(3) Adherence to principles of war. The allies were able to succeed also by adhering to the main principle of war: Selection and Maintenance of the Aim; they managed to stick to their aim to relieve Tobruk and drive Rommel out of Cyrenaica.

(4) The importance of logistics. The allies triumphed principally because they had an uninterrupted supply flow from Egypt. The Axis forces had to fight with what they had.

(5) The need always for offensive Action. Rommel was able to withdraw with his forces intact principally because he adhered to an essential principle of war: Offensive Action. The Allies therefore had to pursue a cautious advance and were unable to rout Rommel's Forces.

**CHAPTER SEVEN****ROMMEL'S SECOND OFFENSIVE**

1. **Preamble.** At the close of Crusader in January 1942 Auchinleck had replaced the 8 Army Commander after suffering heavy casualties during the battle. He had also failed to destroy the German Armour as he had planned. However, he had succeeded in relieving Tobruk; he had inflicted a defeat on Rommel; he had conquered Cyrenaica and chased Rommel back to Tripolitania. By December 1941, the situation in the Mediterranean was beginning to favour the Axis forces. Hitler had ordered the dispatch of 10 U-boats of the Mediterranean, Fileger Korps II (German Airforce) had been transferred from Russia to Sicily. Rommel was therefore able to receive constant fresh supply of men, equipment and fuel. On the other hand, Auchinleck's supply could only be brought across North Africa from Egypt. Reinforcements expected were also diverted to Burma in the far East as Japanese successes were causing greater alarm for Britain.

2. **Situation In January 1942.** On the Allied side, her forces were spread out between El-Aheila and Tobruk. Its commanders, Ritchie and behind him, Auchinleck, were pre-occupied with plans for invading Tripolitania and refused to believe reports on Rommel's growing strength. The 1 Armour Division had only one of its Brigade operation which was widely dispersed in forward area. 4 Indian Division has one Brigade at Benghazi and another at barce, whilst 7 Armoured Brigade was away in Tobruk refitting. On the Axis side however, the situation was improving everyday. The air situation was more favourable and his material situation

had also improved.

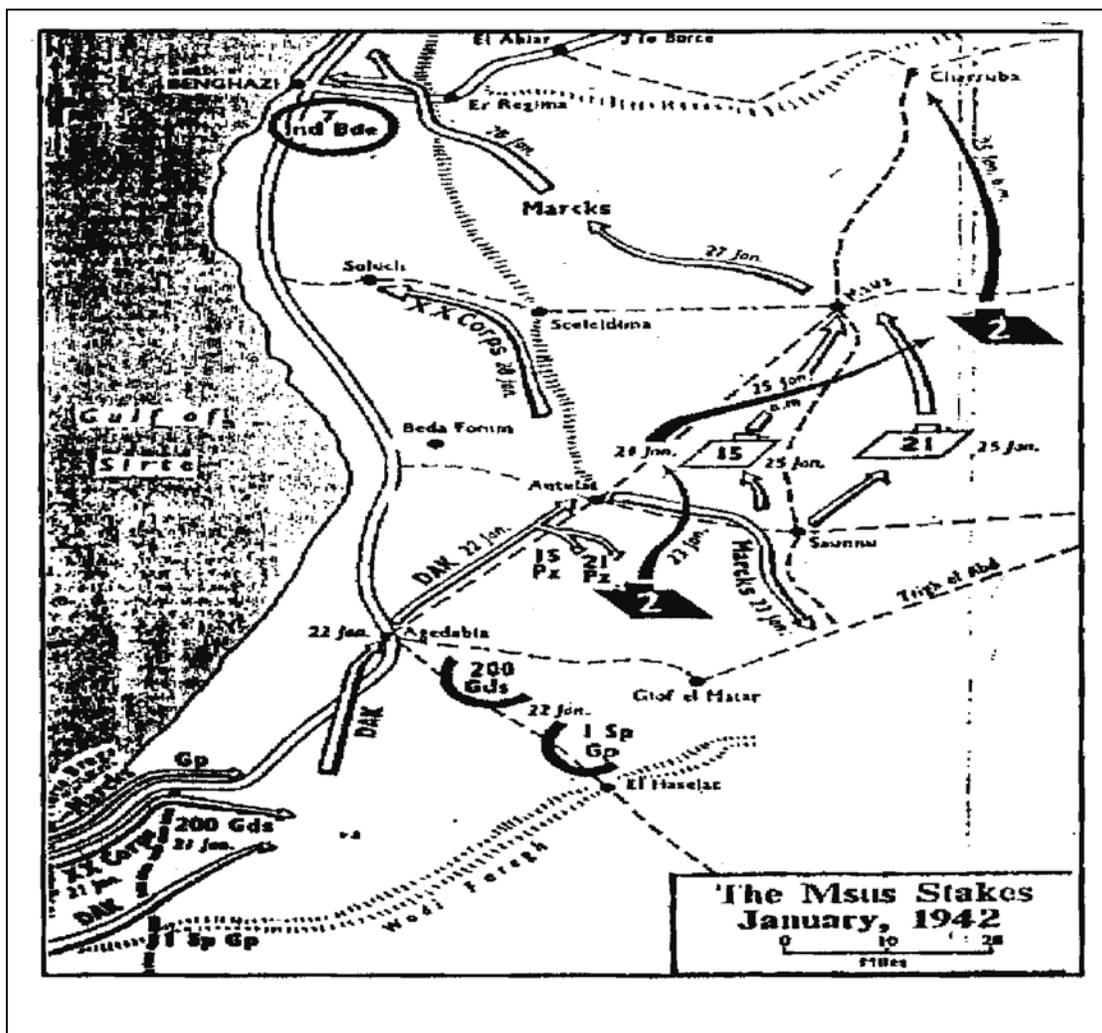
3. **The Offensive.** On 18 January Rommel ordered for a limited operation. The Afdrica Korps was to advance across the desert with its right flank on the Wadi Foregh, 20 Italian Corps would attack centrally; on the Via Bulbia was a special Battle Group containing units opf the 21<sup>st</sup> Panzer Division and 90<sup>th</sup> Light Division. The plan was simple and adaptable. Axis forces gains were quick and swift, 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division were simply pushed aside and by the second day of the advance the Axis forces had reached Msus. Rommel's next move feigned towards Mechili, causing 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division of further withdraw eastward, then thrust northward to the coast cutting off 7 Indian Brigade at Benghazi. By 6 February 8 Army was back to the Gazala- Bir Hecheim line, the same line that 2 months earlier the Axis forces had abandoned.

4. **Fall of Tobruk.** It was planned that a feint was first to be launched in the South to conceal German forces true design and pin down the Garrison at that point. The formation assigned to make the main assault were to arrive at the scene unexpectedly then move eastwards, pass Tobruk in order to give the impression that Germans intended to lay siege to the fortress deployed for the assault in the night and after a heavy artillery bombardment, launched their assault at dawn. The feint attack was to be executed by the XXI Italian Corps while the main force was to consist of African Korps and XX Italian Corps. The assault group moved into its assembly area at 0500 on 20 June after 100 aircrafts hammered their bombs on the break-in points. The infantry of the African Korps moved forward. The German attack moved steadily on and after a brief action in which 50

enemy tanks were shot up, the African Korps manage to reach the cross roads and at about mid-day, withheld the key to Tobruk. At Port Palestine several British ships weighed anchor and made as if to leave harbour apparently to get their men away by the sea. The German AA and the Arty were directed on the targets and six ships were sunk. By night, two-third of the fortress was in German's hands and at about 0940 hours the following morning General Klopper GOC 2 South Infantry Division and Garrison Commander to Tobruk announced the capitulation of the fortress.

5. **Booty.** The booty here was enormous. Besides the large supply dumps, war materials of all kinds approximating in all the equipment of a whole division were lost to the German, many British POW were also captured. Between 26 May and 20 July, 60,000 British, South Africans, Indians, New Zealanders, French and Australians were taken prisoners of war. Germany had destroy 2,000 British tanks and armoured vehicles, the equipment of an entire British offensive army lay destroyed in the desert and thousands of the vehicles were now being used by German troops.

**FIGURE 9: ROMMEL'S SECOND OFFENSIVE (THE MSUS STAKES)**



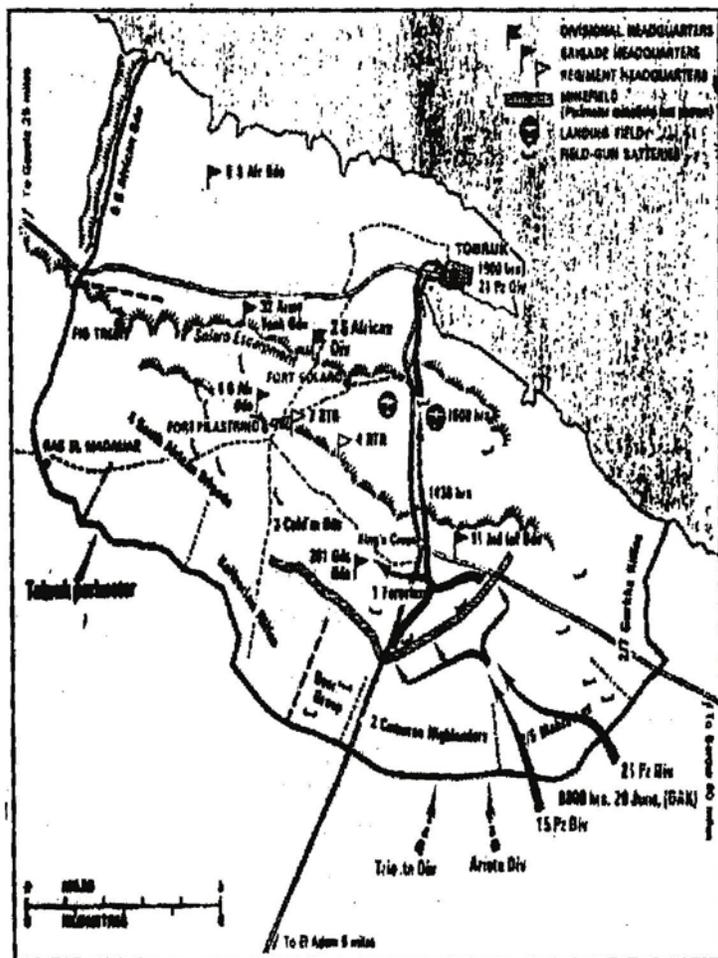
6. **Reason for Allied Failure.** Ritchie and Auchinleck refused to believe that Rommel was getting reinforcements and was likely to attack. Instead they concentrated on plans for the attack of Axis position. Allied forces were spread out and could not provide mutual support. Axis forces were able to defeat Allied forces piecemeal. The Allied force had still not mastered the art of integrating of tanks, antitank guns and artillery in support of each other. Allied high command priorities focused on Burma in the

Middle East that reinforcements were directed from North Africa to India and Burma. Method of command was also faulty. Whereas Rommel commanded from the front and was always able to cash in on opportunities when presented, the Allied commanders remained at the rear expecting their operational orders to control their battles. The unfavourable supply for the Allies was precarious. Rommel had no such problem by this time as reinforcement were able to reach him whereas, the Allies reinforcements could not. The speed and boldness of Rommel's forces putting to effect the principle of "Offensive Action" everywhere by ensuring that their forces had the right mix and were of the right balance grouping.

7. **Lesson Learnt.** Basically the same lessons were brought which for some reason the Allies had not learnt. They include:

- a. The need for a mobile defence made up of combined arms with balance grouping being able to react to Rommel's forces.
- b. The effectiveness of quick mobile combined arms groups in desert warfare.
- c. The need for forces to be able to provide mutual support in combat.
- d. The panic that can be caused by deep quick infiltrating thrusts into enemy territory counting on speed and sustained momentum.
- e. The effectiveness of command from the front where quick decisions can be made to exploit success or avoid defeat.
- f. The diminished importance of holding ground and the greater need for destruction of forces in desert warfare.

**FIGURE 10: ROMMEL'S SECOND OFFENSIVE (THE FALL OF TOBRUK)**



- g. The greater importance of manoeuvre in desert warfare rather than static firepower.
- h. The contribution of the element of surprise in achieving success even against greater odds.
- i. The need for balanced grouping to achieve flexibility in

reaction to the unforeseen.

- j. The greater importance of “Offensive Action” in desert warfare as the ground being featureless does not provide for its tactical use in battle.
- k. The importance of well rehearsed and efficient drills in battle operations and recovery and repairs.
- l. The overwhelming dependence of any force on logistics in desert warfare.
- m. The need for a clear aim and a plan even in defensive operations. The Allied forces had forces spread out across Cyrenaica with no concept for the operation or plan.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE BATTLE OF GAZALA**

1. **Situation.** The Allies had decided to establish their defences along a line starting from Gazala down to Bir Hacheim to the South. Between the month of January to May of 1942 other Axis forces bombarded Malta so heavily that Allied re-supply virtually came to a halt. Meanwhile, Rommel's supply was getting through. By April and May 1942 Rommel was receiving between 93 to 99 percent of his supplies.

2. **Plan.** The Gazala line consisted of minefields running South to Bir Hacheim with a series of fortified strongholds each held by a Brigade group from VIII Corps. These were designed to break up any Axis attack, at the same time canalizing the enemy forces to a desired ground for destruction. On the other hand, Rommel hoped to outflank the line south of Bir Hacheim and strike north and north east towards Acroma and Tobruk.

3. **Forces**

a. **Allied.**

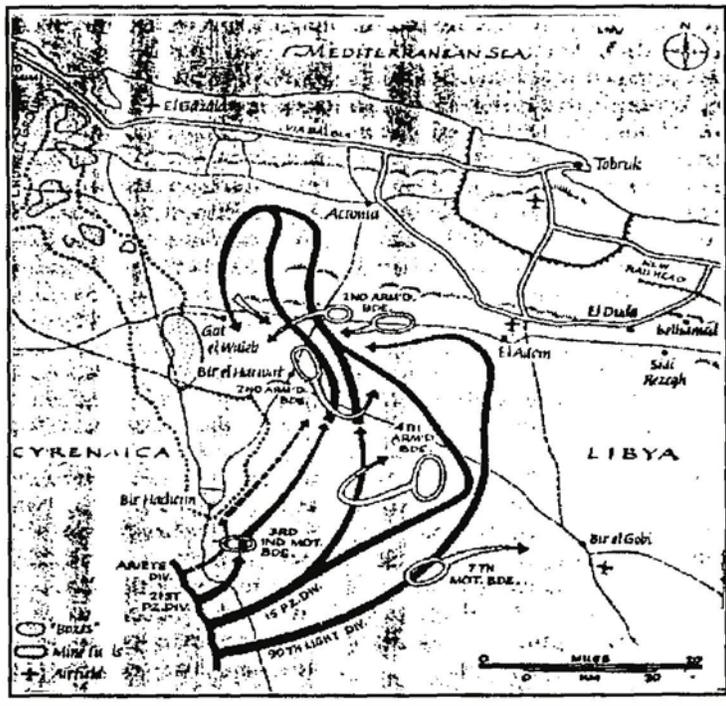
(1) **XIII Corps**

- (a) 1 South African Division.
- (b) 2 South African Division (Tobruk).
- (c) 50 Infantry Division.
- (d) 32 Army tank Brigade

(2) **XXX Corps.**

- (a) 1 Armoured Division.
- (b) 7 Armoured Division.
- (c) 201 Guards Brigade.
- (d) 1 Free French Brigade.

**FIGURE 11: THE BATTLE OF GAZALA (PLAN)**



b. Axis

(1) Dutche African Korps (DAK)

- (a) 90 Light Division.
- (b) 15 Panzer Division.
- (c) 21 Panzer Division.
- (d) Ariete Division.
- (e) Trieste Division

(2) Italian X Corps.

(a) Brescia Division.

(b) Pavia Division.

(3) **Italian XII Corps**

(a) Sabiatha Division.

(b) Trento Division.

4. **Tanks.**

a. Allied - 849.

b. Axis - 560.

5. **Air**

a. Allies - 320 Aircrafts.

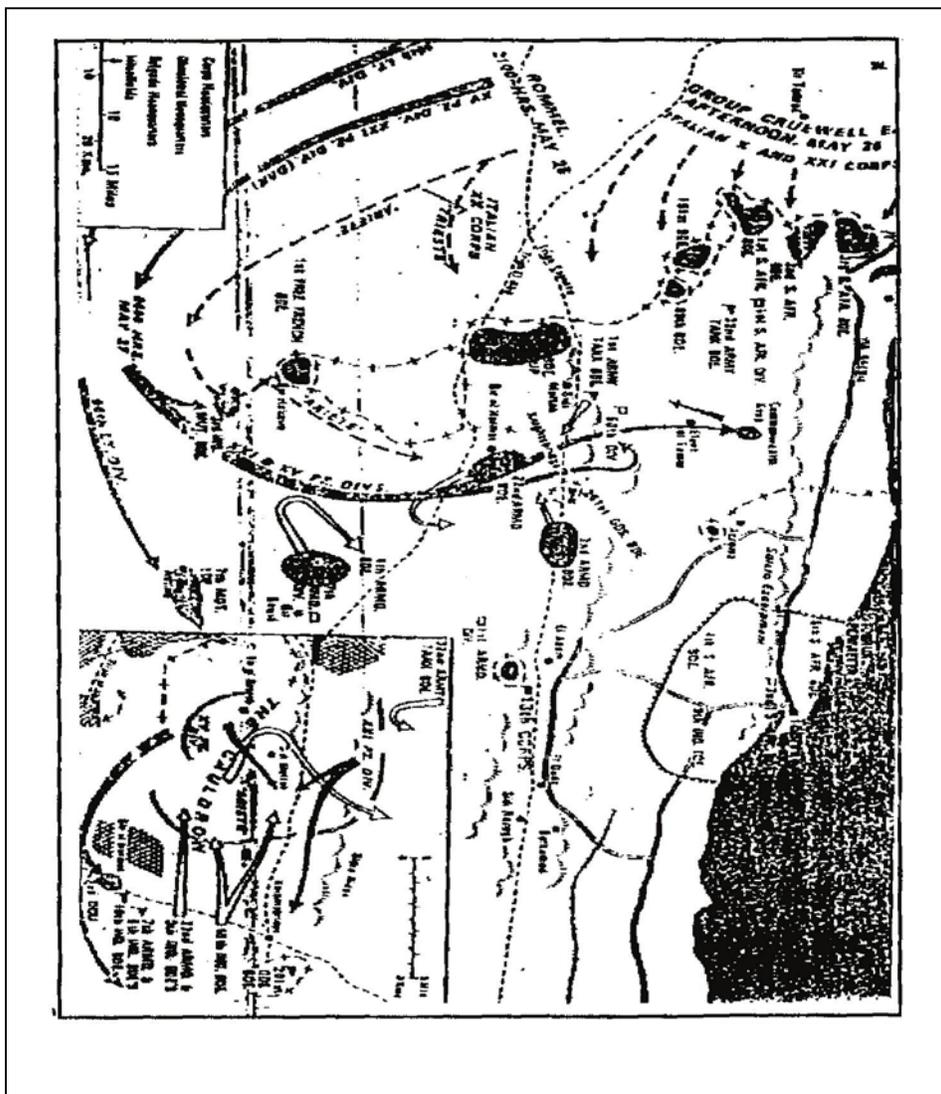
b. Axis - 704 Aircrafts.

6. **Conduct.** General Cruewell commanding the Italian X and XXI Corps began the attack in the north on the afternoon of 26 May 1942. General Rommel commanding the main attacking force, Duetche African Korps, headed south east 2100hrs and by 0600hrs 27 May the next day had assembled at the start line south of Bir Hacheim.

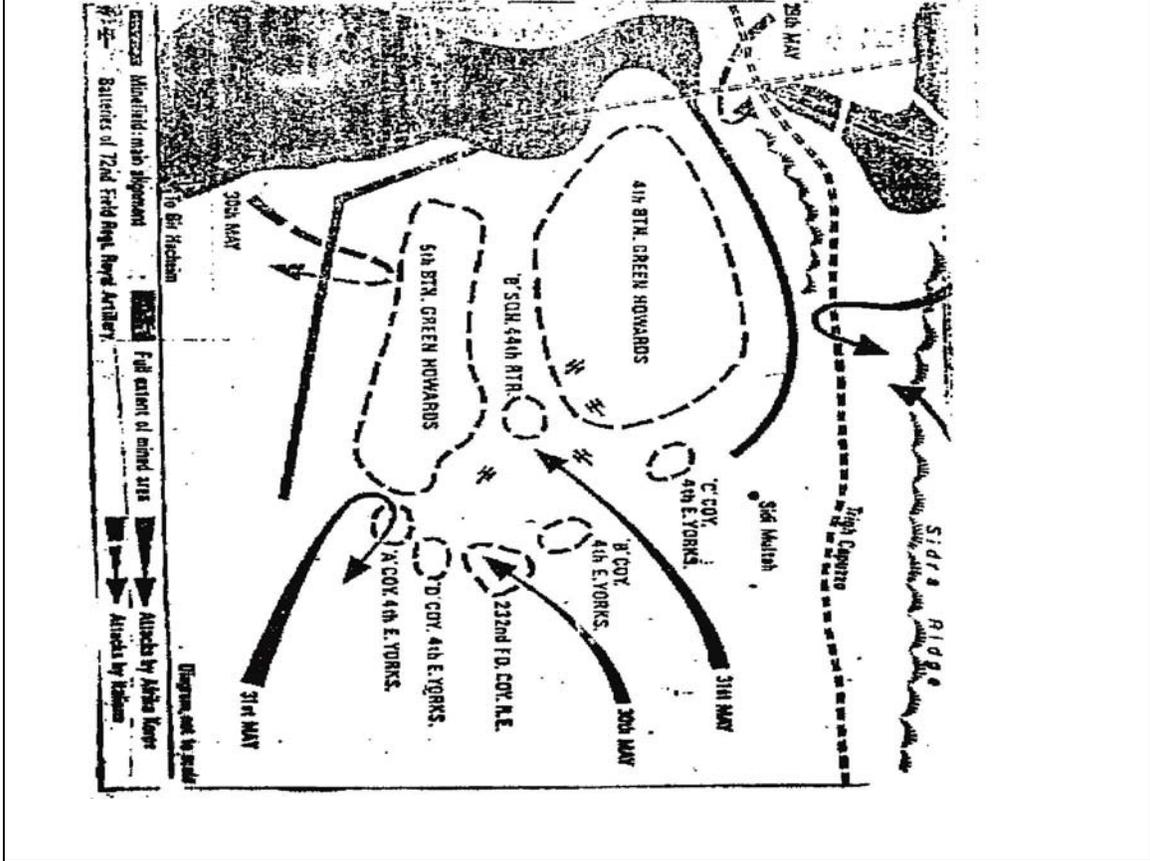
7. **Rommel's Initial Success.** Out flanking Allied defence line, Rommel by morning of the 27 May had pushed back 4 Indian Motorised Brigade, 7 Motorised and 4 Armoured Brigade; meanwhile the Italian Triests Division had got lost and had mistakenly run into 150 brigade. Nevertheless as the Axis forces pushed north across Sidra Ridge, they were attacked on both flanks, losing one third of their armour and were running short of water and fuel. For the next two days fierce fighting ensued with the Axis forces making no progress and unable to push a supply line through the Allied

minefields on the Gazala line. Finally on 29 May, Rommel abandoned the move north and retired his armour into the “Cauldron” with its back to the Allied minefield to await the 8 Army’s counter attack.

**FIGURE 12: THE BATTLE OF GAZALA (THE ATTACK)**

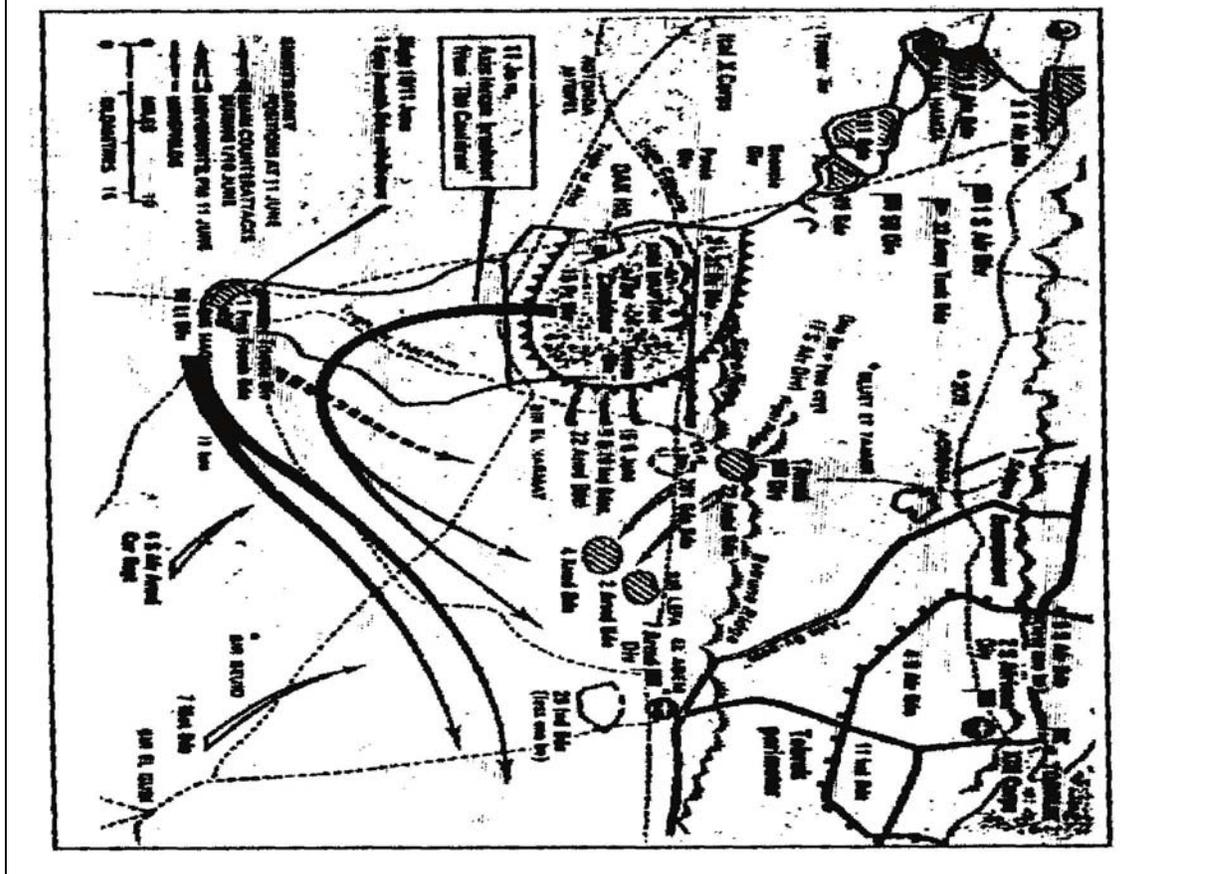


**FIGURE 13: THE BATTLE OF GAZALA (ROMMEL'S ATTACK ON 150<sup>TH</sup> BDE IN THE CAULDRON)**





**FIGURE 15: THE BATTLE OF GAZALA (THE BREAKOUT)**



a. **The Cauldron.** The much expected Allied attack did not come for the next 6 days on 5/6 June by which time 150 Brigade position had been penetrated from the west establishing a supply route for Rommel's force. The Allied attacks therefore with 10 Italian and 21 Guards Brigade were easily repulsed suffering heavy casualties.

b. **The Breakout.** By 10 June Rommel went on the offensive attacking south and after fierce fighting managed to dilodge the valiant Free French Brigade at Bir Hacheim. Rommel then burst out of the Cauldron pushing south and then east and by the afternoon of 11 June 15 Panzer and 90 Light Div reached an area six to ten miles

south and south west of El; Adem. German forces took El Adem after a fierce battle on 12<sup>th</sup> June. The Allies again suffered considerable casualties. On 14 June the Allied had started blowing up ammunition dumps in the Gazala line and falling back to Tobruk. By 18 June Rommel had Tobruk completely surrounded and had captured 6,000 prisoners of war.

**CHAPTER NINE****THE FIRST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN**

1. **Situation.** With the fall of Tobruk, large stocks of food, fuel and all manner of war equipment fell into Rommel's hands from retreating British forces which were badly depleted both in strength and morale. General Auchinleck took desperate action by moving to Mersa Matruh and then personally took command of the 8 Army from General Richie. Auchinleck deployed 10 Corps and 13 Corps to hold and delay Rommel's forces at Alam El Halfa ridge, a fortified line between El Alamein on the sea and the Quattaras Depression some 64kms inland. Meanwhile 30 Corps was to complete the defence of El Alamein. However, Rommel's move forestalled the completion of this plan forcing 10 and 13 Corps to withdraw and join the 30 Corps. After this, these two forces remained in state in defensive warfare. Rommel was now only 96kms away from Alexandria.

2. **El Alamein Line.** The physical description of El Alamein after which the line is named, is only a minor station on the Desert Railway which runs along the coast. It was important from the defence point of view, in that it was the northern most point of Alamein line. The choice of this place in 1942 as the final defence was for two reasons:

- a. If well defended 2 full strength Infantry Divisions and a large Armoured force, it would not be easy to dislodge.
- b. The terrain in the south would cramp in the movement of the armour. The southernmost point was formed by the Quattara Depression, a vast expanse of quick sand and salt marshes and

therefore a perfect obstacle to traffic. To the south of the Depression lay the sand sea equally impenetrable.

3. **Tactical advantages of El Alamein.** The Alamein line was flanked on the north by sea and on the south by sandy wastes. Quattara Depression and the sand sea. The only piece of land suitable for the passage of an army was therefore the area between these two extreme obstacles. This stretch measured about forty miles across its narrowest point, which can by no means be regarded as too long a line in desert warfare. The great strength of the line lay in the fact that it was open only to a frontal attack over its narrow distance since it could not be out flanked from either side. Further, this stretch of forty miles was covered by ridges and hillocks in the center which could be made into strong defensive positions placed at 15 miles interval across the stretch. Three defended locations scattered about other high features capable of being put into similar use. The right flank was anchored by the El Alamein defensive position blocking the railway and the coast road. In the center was the locality of Bab El Quattara; this place was full of cliffs; and finally the locality of Abu Dweise which commanded the routes to the cliffs and to a track in the Quattara Depression.

4. **Allied Forces.** On withdrawing his troops to the alamein Quattara Depression line on 29 June, General Auchinleck had to regroup and redistribute them to the best advantage. With Rommel's force pressing on relentlessly, Auchinleck hurried and allotted the southern part of the line to 13 Corps and the north to 30 Corps. General Auchinleck wrote: "These battle groups had as their foundation the maximum number of field guns that could be provided for each and only just as many infantries as we needed to

protect them. The idea was that in this war, the defence could be kept mobile, the battle groups could be moved rapidly to part of the front where danger was the greatest.” Obviously, this was by no means an ideal arrangement for defending the most vital line, on which depended the fate of Egypt and the Middle East and to a certain extent the outcome of the war. General Auchinleck did not place great reliance on the impregnability of its collapse. Such must have been the trend of his thought, for behind the Alamein line, as this stage was being prepared yet another work was being handled by the Delta Force. Not needing a third Corps headquarters in Alamein, the staff of the X Corps to Alexandria was to be dispatched to take command of the Delta Force and to supervise preparations of what may be called the threshold defence of the Nile Delta. Thus, General Auchinleck regrouped, redistributed and reorganized his force along the line.

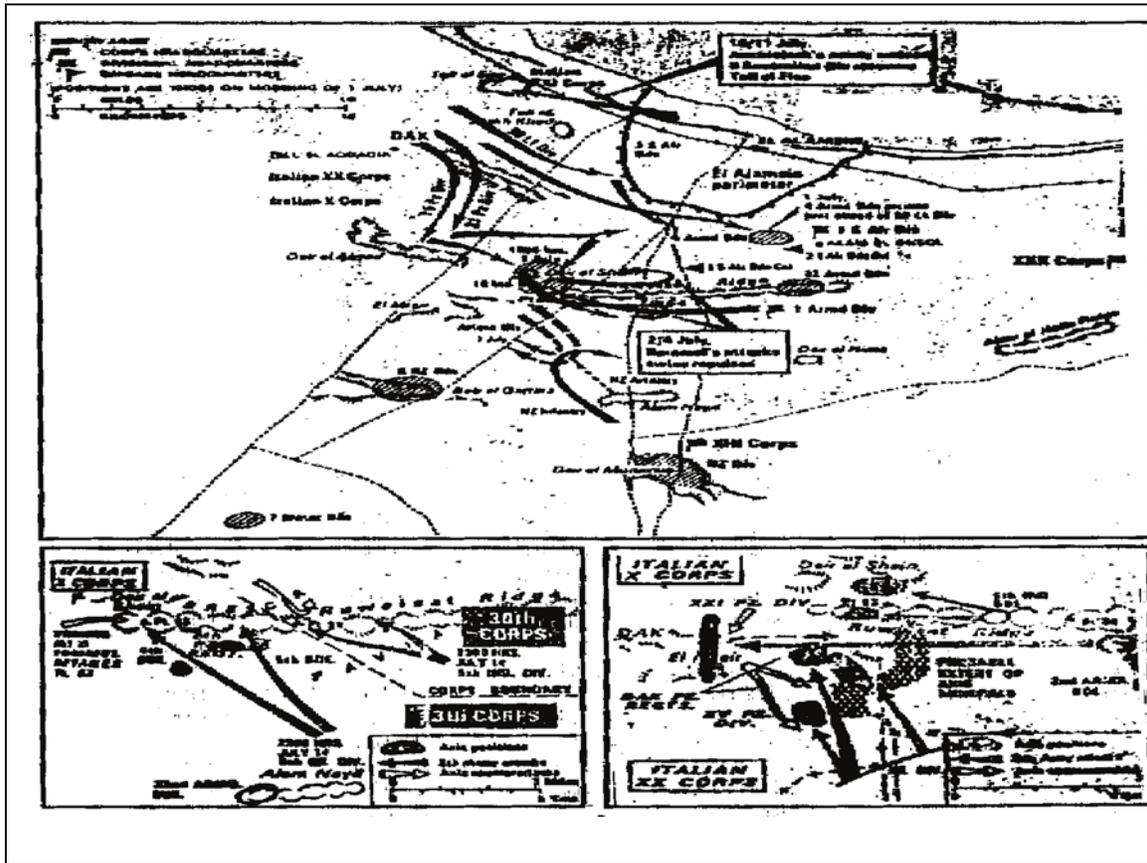
5. **Axis Forces.** Facing the Allied Force was the Axis Force Rommel comprising four Corps, three Italian and one German. The German Corps was the desert-famous African Korps facing the Allied XXIII Corps and XXX Corps across El Alamein Quattara Depression. Important land marks were the Ruweisa Ridge, Alam El Hala and Quarret El Abd. The African Korps comprised 15 Pannzer Division, 21 Panzer Division and 90 Light Division. The three Italian Corps XX XXI were essentially facing the Allied XXX Corps in the North at El Alamein fortification. The Italian force had two armoured and seven infantry divisions, besides some odd groups. Because of the land doubtfull fighting ability of most Italian soldiers, they were stiffened with some German troops and the force was used essentially between the German Corps.

6. **Conduct.**

a. **Rommel's Attack on the Rhine.** Hardly had the Allied XXX and XII Corps taken their positions in the northern and southern sectors when the Axis troops closed up and attacked in the areas of both Corps. 1 South African Division was holding El Alamein fortification while 5 Indian was holding Ruweisat Ridge with 18 Indian Brigade on Deir El Shein. On the morning of July 1, the Axis launched vigorous simultaneous attacks on both the South African and Indian positions. After a whole day's fighting under cover of heavy sand storm, 18 Indian Brigade was overrun while the 1 South African Division held shock of the first Axis attack on the El Alamein line. Robbed them of a precious initiative and gained time for the organization of the rest of the forces into defence line for the Allies. Rommel was effectively stopped and forced to go into defence.

b. **The Allied Counter Attacks.** While the 18<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade written off, Rommel was expected to turn his attention to the South African Division which was holding the El Alamein railway station fortress. A concentrated blow on this strong point would open the coastal roads to the Axis for a drive to Alexandria. Auchinleck decided that the best way to keep the fortress intact and to help the South African Division was to launch a fierce counter attack against the Axis and create a major diversion. He accordingly ordered the XIII Corps to wheel North and strike the flank and rear of the Axis disposition while XXX Corps would hold the ground in the North and check all Rommel's attempts to advance eastward. The Allied

**FIGURE 16: FIRST BATTLE OF THE ALAMEIN**



Offensive lasted 2 July to 5 July and the net result was that a thrust against El Alamein fortification, if such had been Rommel's intention was not allowed to succeed. In order to keep Rommel and his force perpetually conforming to moves of his own choice General Auchinleck ordered the XXX Corps to open a fresh but second counter attack by the 8<sup>th</sup> Army towards the Alamein line on the coastal area. The offensive which lasted over 24 hours entrenched the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Division in the Tel El Eisa mounds. The third Allied counter attack on point 64 forward of Ruseiwat Ridge and involving the XXIII Corps and the XXX Corps was also successful. The final and the sixth big counter-attack attempted by

Auchinleck before departing the scene started on 26 July with an attack along the south of the Tel El Eisa salient. The failure of this offensive convinced General Auchinleck that the 8 Army was incapable of undertaking a large scale successful offensive in its existing condition. Its great draw back was a continued lack of armour and artillery. They decided to remain on the defensive until they were ready for a fresh and final offensive while simultaneously increasing his armoured strength. The Alamein line had been the means of saving Egypt and by consolidating it, the 8 Army had laid the foundation of its ultimate victory in North Africa.

7. **Change of Commanders.** On August 4, Churchill visited Egypt to size up the situation. With discontent at home against Churchill for his handling of the war in Europe. He pressed Auchinleck for an early offensive but Auchinleck strongly resisted. Churchill therefore appointed Alexander as Commander-in- Chief in the Middle East and Scott to command 8 Army. But Gott was killed when he was shot down in an aircraft on his way to Cairo for a rest. Montgomery was brought from England and appointed to fill the vacancy. Other changes at lower level were made but the result of these changes made the resumption of the Allied offensive to be put off to a much later date than Auchinleck had proposed. Churchill ordered General Alexander to destroy at the opportunity the German Italian Army commanded by Field Marshall Rommel together with all its supplies and establishment in Egypt. General Alexander's directive to Montgomery was similarly worded

*Your prime and immediate task is to prepare for offensive action against German-Italian forces with a view to destroying them at the earliest possible moment. Whilst preparing this attack, you must hold your present position and on no account*

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*allow the enemy to penetrate east of them. You must make this directive known to all troops.*

**CHAPTER TEN****BATTLE ALAM EL HALFA**

1. **Situation.** General Montgomery having taken over proceeded to give direct to the directive given to by re-deploying his forces and by taking steps to bring his army into full accord with his views as to what an army should be like. He has clear cut ideas and strong views in some matters such as his theory of tactics and strategy in matter of proper distribution of the fighting forces; these include: that the morale of troops was of paramount importance; that the men should have confidence in their leader; that their living should be comfortable yet tough; that they should not be asked to undertake jobs beyond their capacities and training; that the men should not be broken into groups of independent units but should be allowed to fight as whole and integrated divisions; that the armour and artillery should be employed in mass; that the atmosphere about the men must be free from distractions; that the Light Army needed a reserve Corps and finally that the Eight Army should be reformed on foundation of leadership, equipment and training. The Eight Army proved highly receptive to his tonic suggestions and responded with great enthusiasm. Earlier defensive preparation in the rear area had been stopped and troops had been told there would be no further withdrawal. The X Corps had been created as reserve Corps. And the build-up of the Eight Army continued. At the same time, the Allied force was waging relentless war against stretched line of communication of the Axis.

2. **Forces.** By August, the Alamein Line and the forces disposition



Infantry Division, 50 UK Division, and 4 NZ Infantry Brigade Earmarked to join 8 Army were 8 Artmy Division, 10 Armoured Division, 44 Infantry Division, 51 Infantry Division, 1 Army Tank Brigade and 9 Armoured Brigade.

b. **Conduct.** At midnight 30/31 August, Rommel struck. The attack was in three thrusts north, center and south. The main thrust was the one in the south against XIII Corps. Here Rommel employed the whole of his African Corps and XX Italian Corps. The Plan was to break through the southern sector of the Allied defence and then turning north, to drive towards the sea behind XXX Corps. When General Montgomery was sure of the Direction of Rommel's attack, he switched all the armour under command of 10 Armoured Division to the sea between Alam El Halfa Ridge and New Zealand division position. It was selected as the killing ground for the Axis. Regrouping of the Allied forces was also undertaken simultaneously to recreate a reserve to take the place of the original one moving into action. Rommel fell for the false 'going' map deliberately planted for him and walked into the Allied chosen killing ground. The Germans, now 'bogged' down suffered heavy casualties. The ground through which the Axis tanks had come in and the Axis force fought back fiercely and withdrew successful during 4 and 5 September. Thus ended the battle of Alam El Halfa. The battle was significant as the Eight Army's first major action under its new commander and General Rommel's second major engagement in that the battle was fought with the automation of a machine. All contingencies were foreseen and provided against. The Eight Army fought like a single,

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united body under direct control of the Army Headquarters.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **THE SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN**

1. **Situation.** General Montgomery had succeeded in his first battle as a commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army having broken off Rommel's attack at Alam El Halfa. He now began to prepare for the second battle of Alamein; he could now count on having three Corps, the 10, 13 and 30 with three armoured divisions, seven infantry division and a number of independent armoured and Allied brigades. On the other side were the half Italian, their total of 12 divisions comprising of two armoured and two motorized German divisions, two armoured, one motorized, four infantry and one Italian parachute divisions. These divisions sounded for more formidable than they were, since every one was short of men and equipment. Comparing equipment the Allies had 435 armoured cars and the Axis 192; 1029 Allied tanks to the Axis 496, over 200 guns to the Axis 1200; 1500 anti guns to the Axis 850. Similarly, in the air the Allies had 530 serviceable combat aircraft to the Axis 350. In logistics, the two sides were more unevenly matched. While 8 Army had everything it wanted and more, the Axis forces were severely short all vital supplies and had a long line of communication for re-supply.

2. **Preparations.** When General Montgomery took over command of the 8 Army, he had clear ideas and strong views in matters such as his theory of tactics and strategic balance and proper distribution of fighting forces. These include:

a. **Morale.** Building up morale of the troops especially

breaking the myth of Rommel being invisible was paramount in Montgomery's thinking. He believed that they should have confidence in their leader and that their living should be comfortable yet tough. He believed that soldiers should not be asked to undertake jobs beyond their capacity and training.

b. **Balance Grounding.** Montgomery also believed in balanced grouping and that men should not be broken into groups of independent units. He therefore ensured that units were integrated and trained in the employment of armour and artillery in mass. He believed that all arms must be able to provide intimate support in battle.

c. **Cooperation.** The principle of cooperation was also imbibed in preparation for the coming battle. He believed in the cooperation of all three services in any one important action.

d. **Training.** Montgomery further embarked on intensive training for the individual, sub-groups, units and formations, practicing all in their envisaged role in the future battle. The confidence of the men in their equipment and ability rapidly grew that by the time the battle of El Alamein commenced the men were sure of victory.

3. **Plan.** General Montgomery having satisfied himself that he had a massive superiority particularly in the air and armour, planned for a battle of attrition. He was faced with a heavily defended position whose flanks resting on the sea and the Quattara Depression could not be out flanked. The master

plan consisted of the initial phase. “OPERATION LIGHT FOOT” of attacking north of Miteirya Ridge with the Infantry of XXX Corps pushing forward to the line “Qxalic” and opening corridors in the minefields through which the armour of X Corps would pass. The XXX Corps would then form as screen at “Pierson” while the Infantry breaks down the enemy defences before the final move to “Skinflint” to destroy the Axis armour. The Germans had split their tanks to cover north and south of the line while the Italian provided the main static.

4. **Forces.**

a. **Allied.**

(1) **XXX Corps.**

- (a) 9 Australian Division.
- (b) 51 Infantry Division.
- (c) 2 New Zealand Division.
- (d) 1 South African Division.
- (e) 4 Infantry Division.

(2) **XIII Corps.**

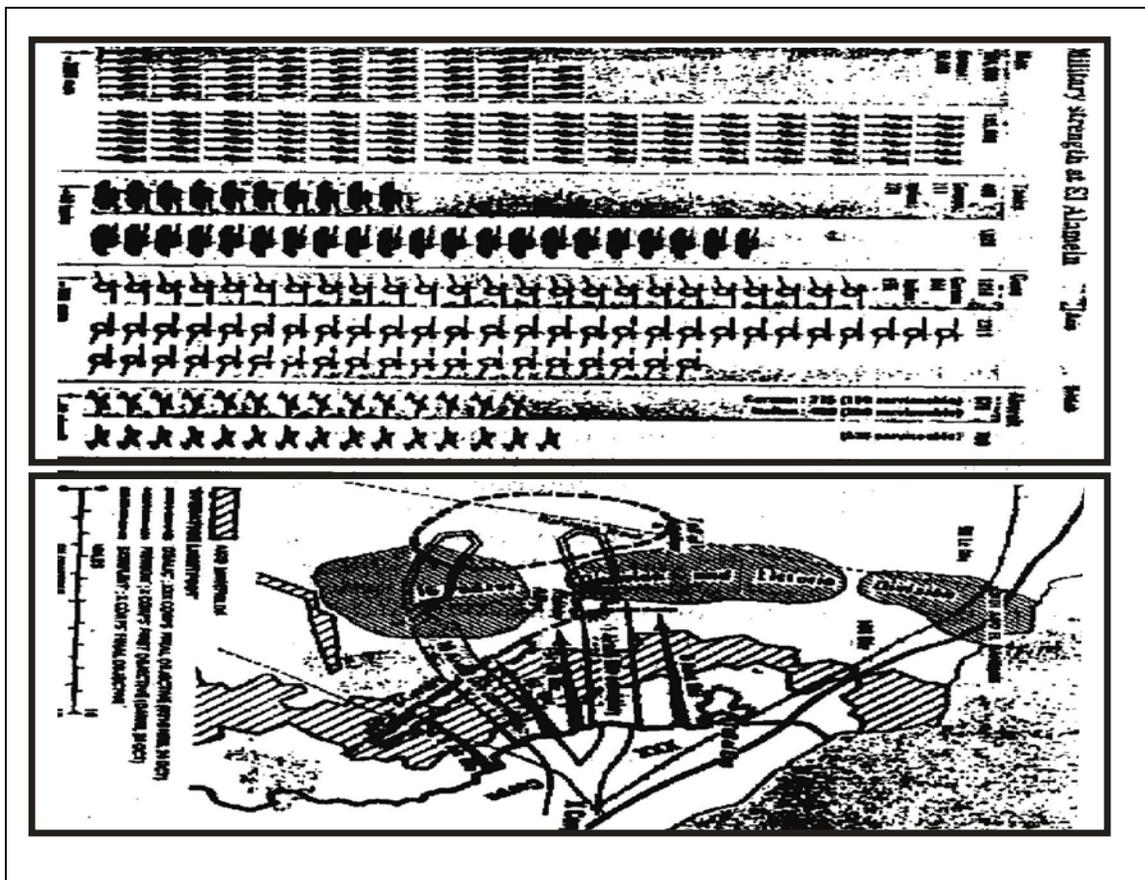
- (a) Greek Armoured Division.
- (b) 50 Infantry Division
- (c) 44 Infantry Division.
- (d) Free French Division.

(3) **X Armoured Corps.**

- (a) 1 Armoured Division.
- (b) 7 Armoured Division.
- (c) 10 Armoured Division.

- b. **Axis.**
  - (1) **Deutche African Korps (DAK)**
    - (a) 15 Panzer Division.
    - (b) 90 Light Division.
    - (c) Littorio Italian Division.
    - (d) Trieste Italian Armoured Division.
  - (2) **XX Corps.**
    - (a) 21 Panzer Division.
    - (b) Ariete Italian Armoured Division.
    - (c) 33 Recce Group.
  - (3) **XXI Italian Corps.**
    - (a) 164 Division.
    - (b) Trento Division.
    - (c) Bologna Division.
    - (d) Ramcke Division.
  - (4) **X Italian Corps.**
    - (a) Brescia Division.
    - (b) Folgore Division.
    - (c) Pavia Division.

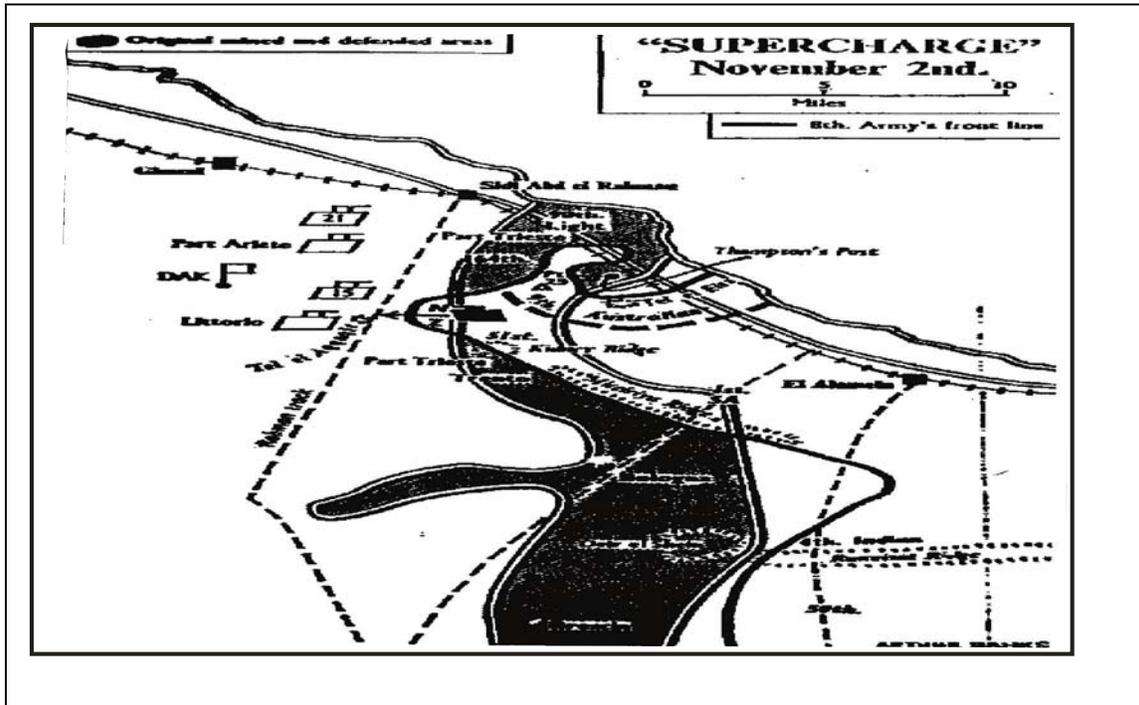
**FIGURE 18: SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN (MILITARY STRENGTH AND OPERATION LIGHT FOOT)**



5. **Conduct.** The battle commander at 2130 hrs on 24 October with a massive artillery bombardment and at 2200 hrs XXX Corps began its advance while XIII mounted diversionary attacks in the south. By dawn most of the XXX Corps had reached their “Oxalic” positions, but the Armour of the X Corps had not be able to clear the minefield. Axis was at first hesitant not knowing which thrust was the main attack. General Stumme who had been in command while Rommel was on leave in Germany, died of a heart attack. By evening 1 Armoured Division had got some unit through, but 10 Armoured Division was still held up in its

corridor. The XIII Corps was holding 21 Panzer Division in the south. Early in the morning of 25 October congestion in the southern corridor reached a dangerous level, but Montgomery insisted that the attempted to break through must country. The New Zealand Division cleared the minefields and attacked south west, fighting off counter attacks by 15 Panzer Division. At Midday Montgomery decided to switch the axis of attack sending 9 Australian Division to strike north covered by 7 Armoured Division. This attack began on 26 October and compelled the Germans to commit their reserves in the North. By this time Rommel had returned from Germany. Montgomery now decided to regroup pulling out 2 New Zealand Division and moving 1 South Africa and 4 Indian Division north. By this stage the Axis fuel problem was acute. Rommel ordered 21 Panzer Division north and on the 27 DAK launched a series of unsuccessful counter attacks on 1 Armoured Division. On the evening of the 28, further attack by the Australian Division had almost reached the coast road and Montgomery began to prepare for a final breakout using Z Corps. His first intention to attack in the far north was amended because German 90 Light Division had moved forward, and at 0200 hrs on 2 November infantry assaulted the Italian positions "Operation Supercharge" further south and armour began to break through. Although at the outset the attacks were contained by German counter attacks, by the evening Hitler forbade any withdrawal, but on the 4<sup>th</sup> Allied armour finally reached open group.

**FIGURE 19: SECOND BATTLE OF ELALAMEIN  
(OPERATION SUPERCHARGE)**



6. **Reasons For Allied Success** The Battle of El Alamein was mainly one of attrition. The reasons for Montgomery's success could be attributed to the following:

- a. Good preparation and planning; careful thought was put into the planning of the battle. The training and morale of the troops were brought to high level before the commencement of the battle.
- b. The Allied had a marked advantage in both quantity and quality of equipment especially with the introduction of the new American Sherman tank.
- c. Montgomery's sure tactical grip in handling the battle, his retention of balance in his creation of reserves and use of them

enabling him to take the initiative and never letting go of it.

d. Montgomery's character, determined and resolute pushing of his men who were inspired by his leadership, made them willing to give him their best.

e. The brilliant engineers' effort that created the corridors through the minefields for the armour to pour through.

f. Air superiority on the Allied side was decisive, providing close support for the 5<sup>th</sup> Army and so sustaining the already high morale of the soldiers.

g. The superior logistic situations in favour of the Allies who had control of the re-supply routes through the Mediterranean Sea.

h. Montgomery's method of command was also a decisive factor. His calmness, his confidence, his refusal to be disturbed or ruffled, the habit of giving his orders personally to his Corps Commanders each morning and evening.

7. **Lessons.** Under the leadership of General Montgomery the Allies finally achieved success. His handling of the 8 Army and battles brought out salient lessons.

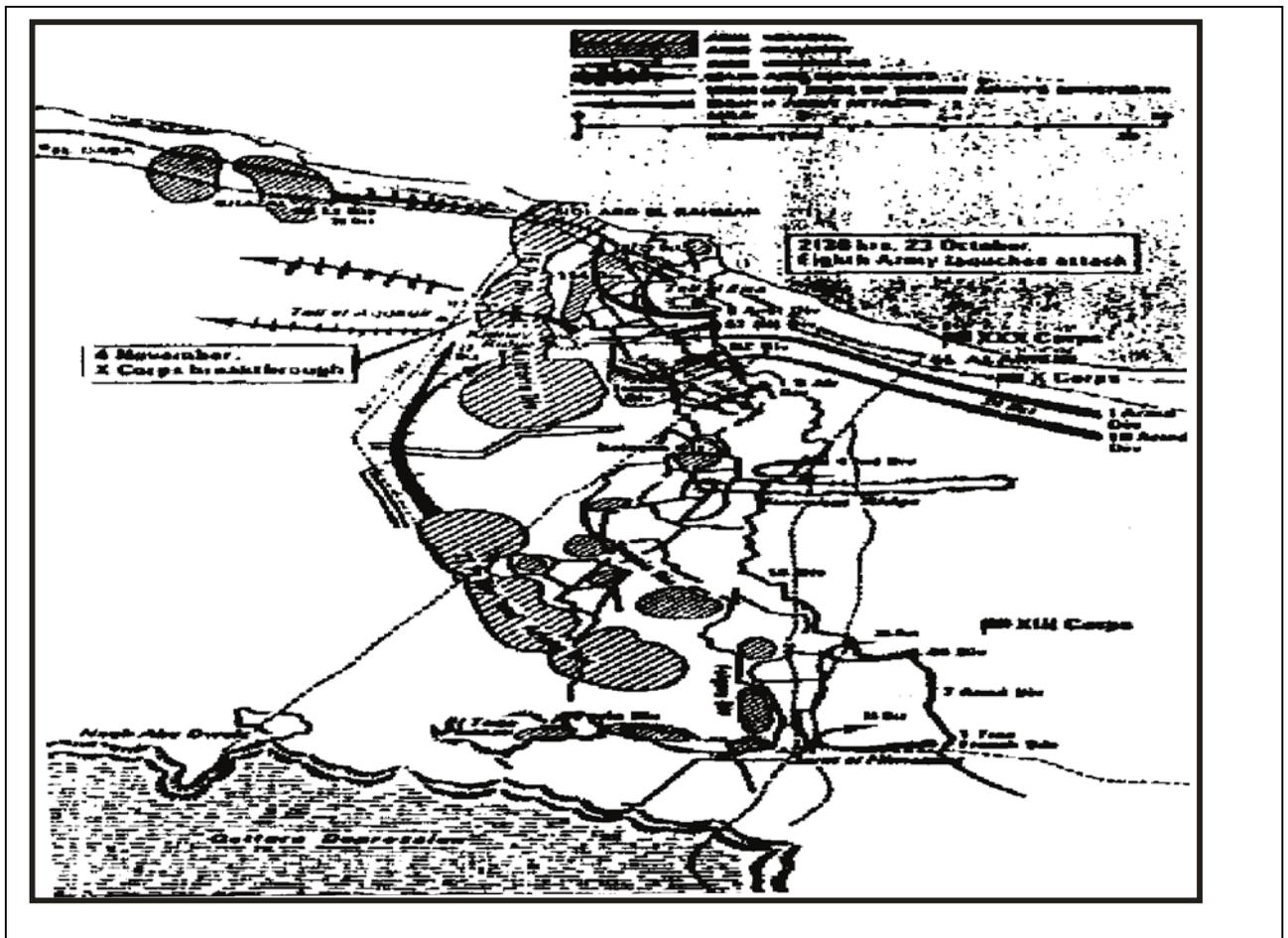
a. **The Need for Sound Preparation and Planning.**

Montgomery put, in a great deal of preparation, including training of his troops for the battle. He also had a master plan that spelt out in detail that every soldier, sub-unit, unit and formation were expected to

do.

b. Selection and Maintenance of the Aim. Montgomery selected his aim and he stuck to it with only minor deviations. This eventually brought him success.

**FIGURE 20: SECOND BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN (EIGHT ARMY ATTACK)**



c. **Employment of Armour.** Correct handling of his armour committing them in whole and concentrating his where and when it mattered most.

- d. **Security.** The principles of “Security” were demonstrated in Montgomery’s insistence that no operation was to be embarked upon without the full compliments of his force. His flanks were always well protected before advancing in pursuit of Rommel.
- e. **Logistics.** The absolute need for adequate logistic support in Desert warfare. The success and failure of operations were directly dependent on the logistic situation.
- f. **Domination of the Air.** The vital requirement of air superiority in battles over open ground such as the desert.
- g. The need for competent leadership which both Montgomery and Rommel provided for their men.
- h. **Political Interference.** The need for non- interference in the conduct of operations by political leaders at home. Rommel would have escaped with a larger part of his forces had Hitler not forbidden his retreat for another twenty four hours.
- i. **The need for High Morale.** The Allied troops fought magnificently under Montgomery, a direct result of their increased morale.
- j. The need for deception was also brought out. For the first twenty four hours, the Axis Command were not sure where the main attack was coming from.

- k. **Cooperation.** The essential requirement for cooperation by all arms and service in achieving the overall aim was also demonstrated in the battle

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **OPERATION TORCH**

1. **Situation** Studies and appreciation by the British Joint Planning Staff had concluded that the invasion of the European continent in 1946 or early 1943 was impracticable. However there was an urgent need to open up a second front against Germany in order to relieve pressure on Russia. After overcoming initial disagreements between the Americans and the British high command on the future strategy of the campaign in 1942 it was decided that the second front should be opened in North Africa.

2. **Plan.** “Operation Torch” was the code name for the landing of the Allied in North Africa. The force would be commanded by an American, General Dwight Eisenhower, and would consist of three Task forces.

a. **Western Task Force.** The Western Task Force with about 33,000 men. Vessels from America were commanded by Major General George Scott Patton (US) and were escorted by a power Naval Force under Rear Admiral Henry K Hewitt (US). The force objective was Casablanca on the Moroccan Atlantic coast.

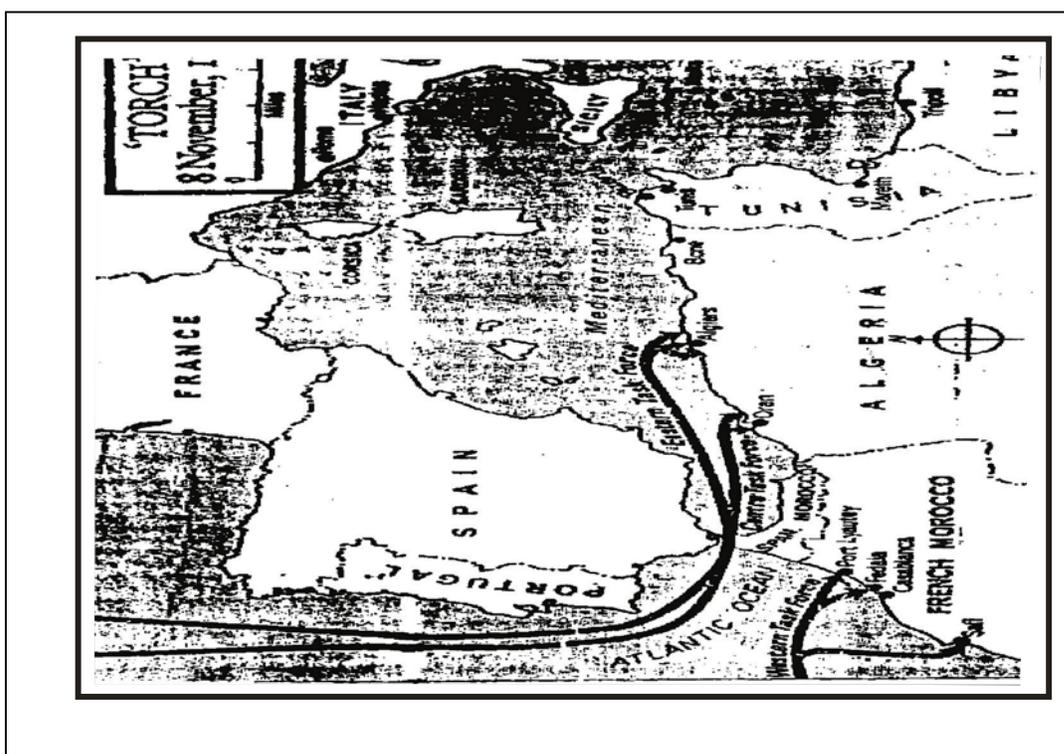
b. **Central Task Force.** The Central Task Force consisted of 39,000 men in 47 ship commanded by Major General Lyod R Fredendall with a naval escort commanded by Commodore Thomas H Troubridge. The objective was Oran on the North African coast.

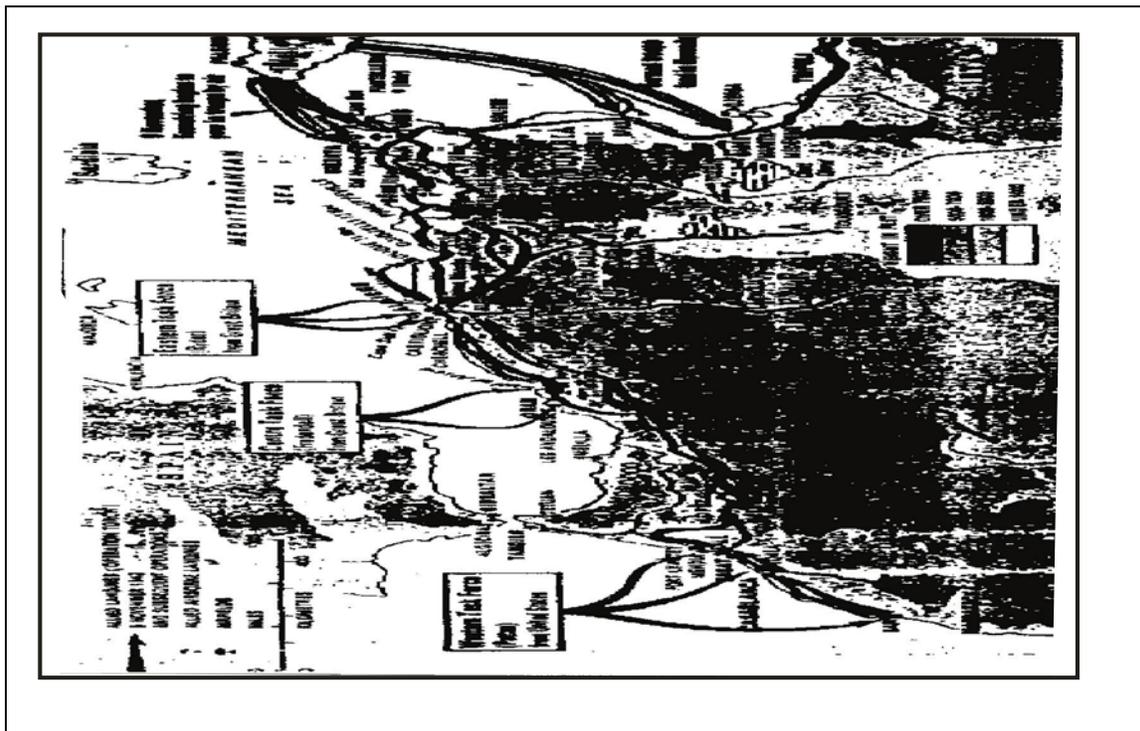
c. **The Eastern Task Force.** The Eastern Task Force of

33,000 men would come from England and was commanded by Major General EW Ryder (UK). This was the only task force with a British contingent. It was to be escorted by a naval force under Vice Admiral Sir Harold M Burough. The objective was to be Algiers in Tunis.

3. **Aim.** The aim of “OPERATION TORCH” was to secure the North Coast of Africa between Casablanca and Algiers.

**FIGURE 21: OPERATION TORCH (THE PLAN)**

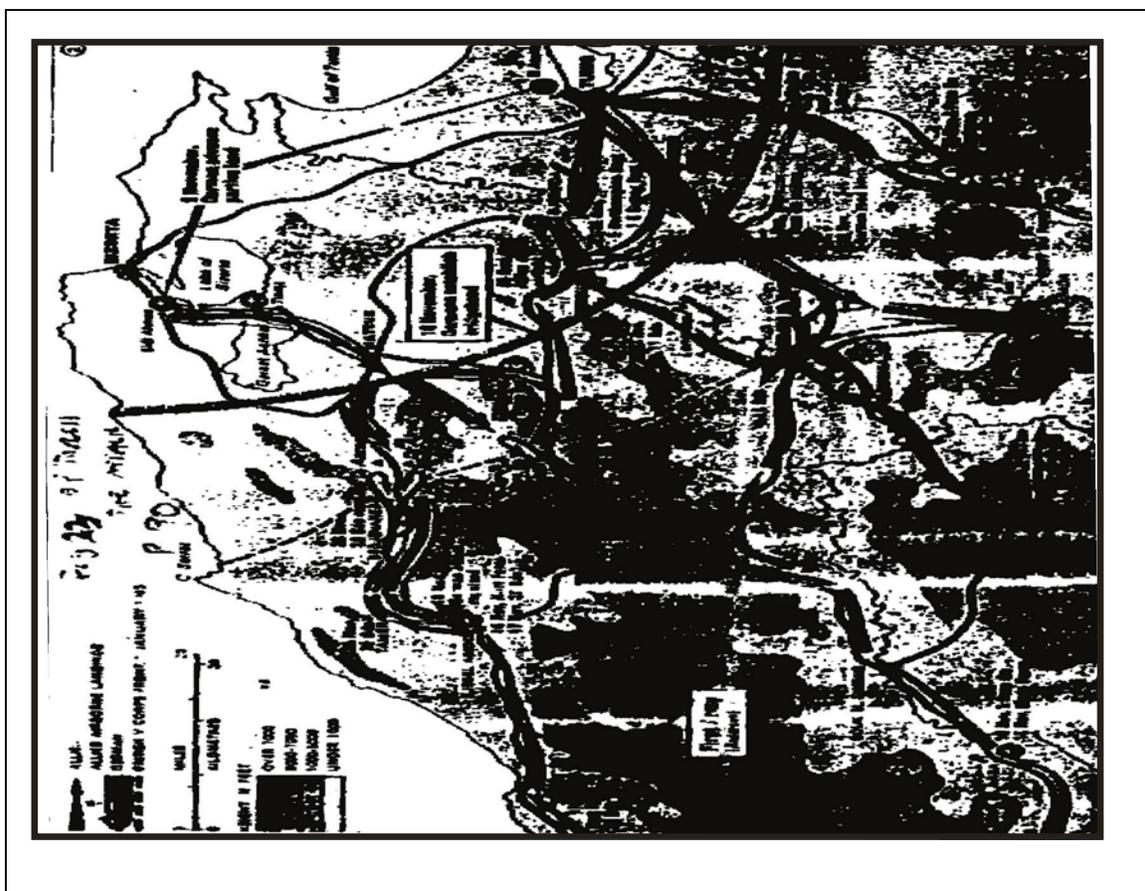


**FIGURE 22: OPERATION TORCH (THE LANDING)**

4. **Conduct.** On 8 November 1942, four day after Rommel started to retreat from El Alamein, American and British forces began landing in French North Africa. The Western and Central Task Forces were American and the Eastern British. It had been hope to arrange that French forces would not resist, but there was sporadic opposition which causes landing difficulties which delayed the attacks on Casablanca and Mehdia. There was considerable fighting at Oran, and two destroyers were lost at Algiers. A cease-fire was arranged on 9 November. The weak point in the Allied plan was that Tunisia could not be occupied in the first landings. German troops began to arrive there on 9 November in order to protect Rommel's rear and pushed out to form a defensive perimeter. The British made seaborne landing at Bougie on 11 November while airborne troops occupied Bone on

the 17<sup>th</sup> only minutes towards Tunisia and fresh parachute drops were made on 15 November by the Americans at Youksles Bains and British at Souk el Arba on the 16. The British force had advanced to Beja by the evening and the next day pushed forward to Sidi Nsir. On 18 November they made contact with the first German patrols. Heavy fighting developed in an attempt to seize Medjez el Bab, but on the 26 the German withdraw. Heavy battles would be fought before the final surrender of all German force in North Africa on 12 May 1943.

**FIGURE 23: OPERATION TORCH (THE ATTACK)**



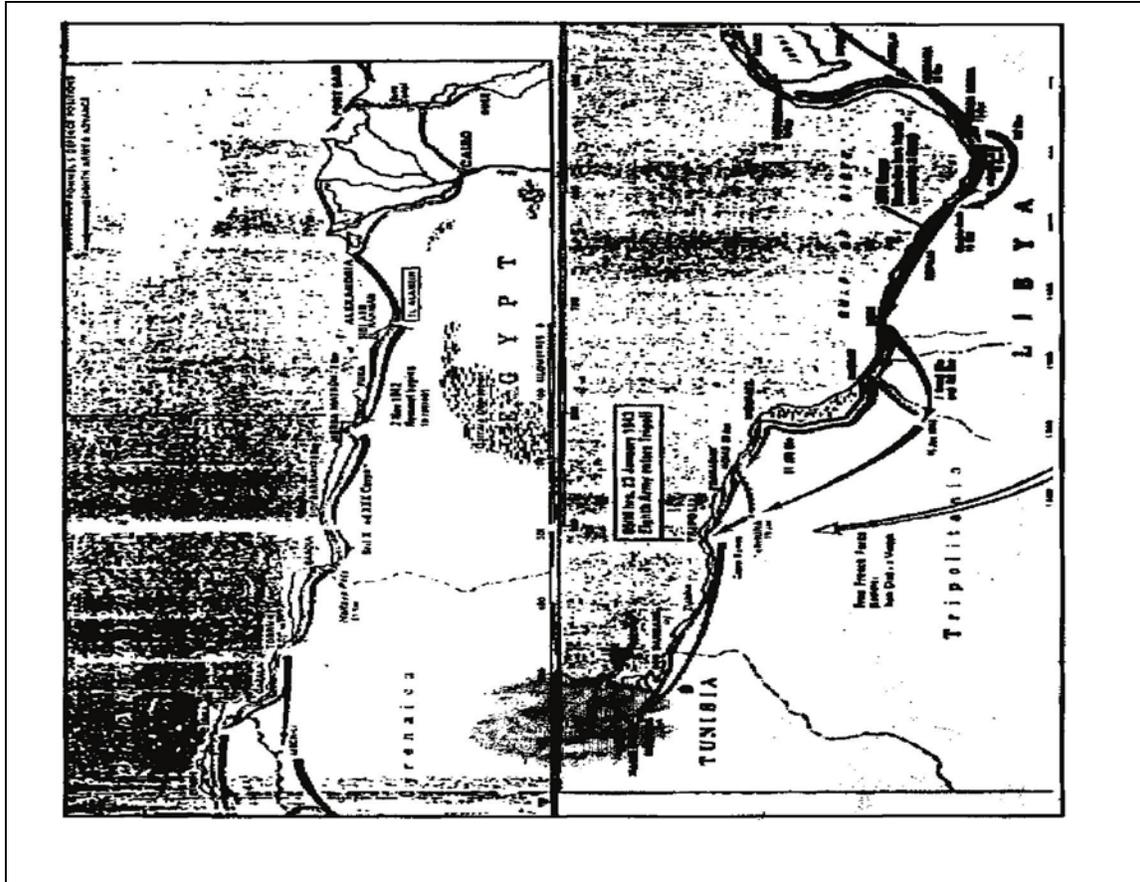
## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN**

### **THE ADVANCE OF THE EIGHT ARMY**

1. **Situation/Plan.** For the first three weeks of its advance from El Alamein, although hampered by heavy rains which had fallen on 6 November, Eight Army met little opposition, for Rommel's forces were too disorganized to counter attack. Temporary defence lines at Fuka and Mersah Matruth were abandoned as soon as pressure built up, and news of his main objective was to gain time to prepare defences at El Agheila and in this he was aided by the weather which had delayed Eight Army's pursuit and supply problems which permitted Montgomery to keep only three divisions forward.

2. **Conduct.** By 23 November Eighth Army had reached Agedabia where it halted reorganize, so that it was not until 12 December that Mersa Brega was attacked. The place was evacuated the next day and Eight Army closed up the El Agheila defence. On 14 December Montgomery set 2 New Zealand Division deep into the desert to outflank the line and by the 16<sup>th</sup> it was threatening Axis supply line so that Rommel had to complete his evacuation of El Agheila. The Germans left a delaying force at Sirte, while they fell back to Buerat. This line was both attacked frontally and outflanked on 15 January, and the second Axis position, Homs Tarhuna, was swiftly breached and Tunis occupied on 23 January. Here supply problems again forced Eight Army to halt, and it was not until 4 February that the first units crossed into Tunisia. The capture of Medenine on the 16<sup>th</sup> brought Eight Army up toward the Mareth line, which was reached on 24 February.

**FIGURE 24: ADVANCE OF EIGHTH ARMY**





## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

### **THE BATTLE OF KASSERINE**

#### **SITUATION**

1. By the beginning of February 1943 with the bulk of Rommel's forces behind the Mareth Line and the Eighth Army so stretched as to pose immediate threat. The Axis supreme command in North Africa accepted Rommel's proposal that a determined assault should be made on the Allied First Army so as to relieve pressure on Tunisia. The Allies were now lying along the Eastern Dorsale range of hills and had been pushed back by limited counter attacks launched during January by General Von Arnim.

#### **PLAN**

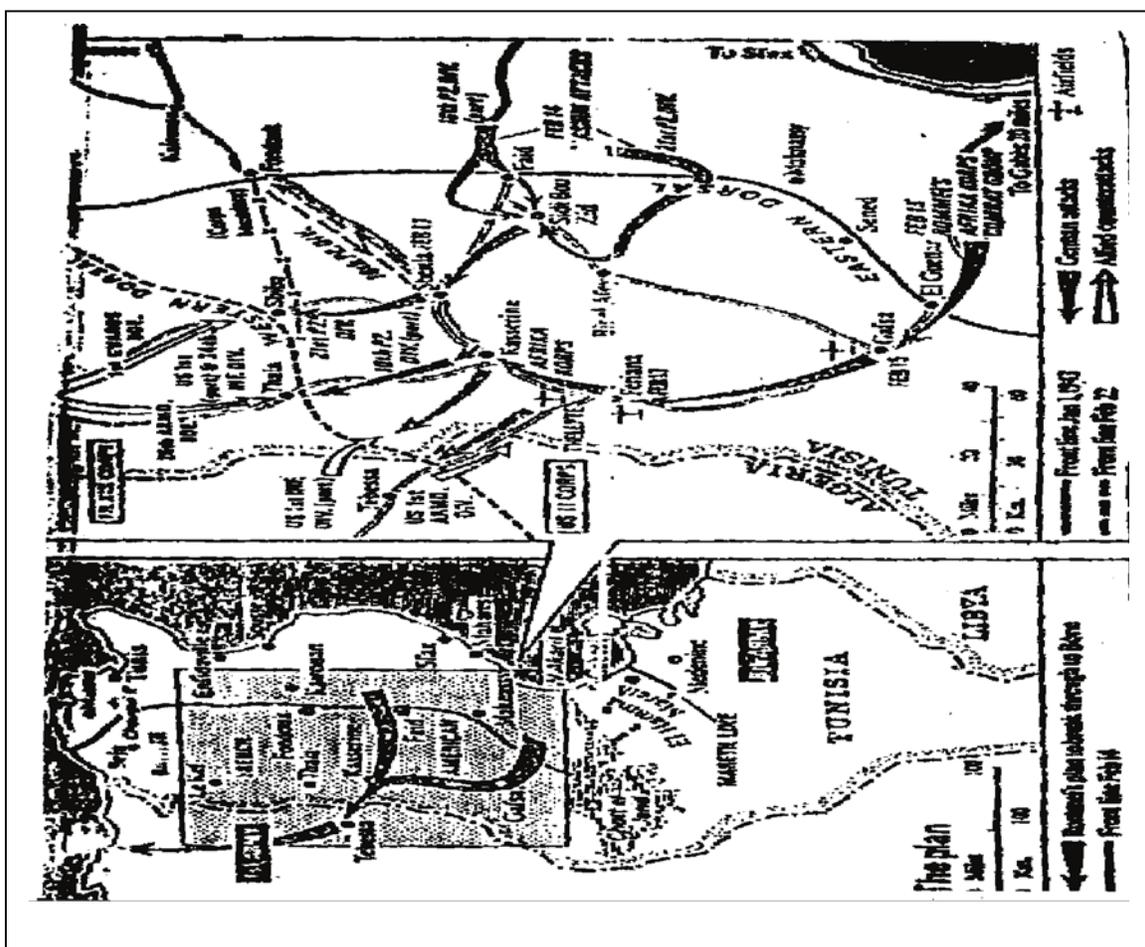
2. Rommel's plan was to strike between American and French sectors towards Kasserine and Tabessa and if the Allies began to fall back, to push towards Bone and Constantine. The major flaw in the plan was that although part of Rommel's and Arnim's forces were to be involved neither had overall command. Von Arnim was more concerned with limited improvements in Axis defensive position than a spectacular breakthrough. General Anderson commanding the First Army knew that his forward positions were still too weak, and had instructed his commanders to fall where necessary to western Dorsale.

#### **CONDUCT**

3. The Axis attack began at 0400 on 14 February, with thrusts which

captured Sidi Bou Zid, and isolated the US forces on Djebels Lessouda and Ksaira. A counter attack by US 1 Armoured Division on 15 February failed to recapture Sidi Bou Zid, while a second Axis thrust Capture Galsa. During the night the US troops on Djebel Lessouda withdrew successfully, and next Axis troops began thrusting toward Ferian and Sbetla. By 18 February both were in Axis hands and their forces were pressing up to Kasserine. Rommel was now urging an immediate thrust towards Tebessa, but at the same time Von Arnin was pulling 10 Panzer Division out of Sbeilta to move into a defensive position further North.

**FIGURE 26: THE BATTLE OF KASSERINE**



4. However, Rommel was now authorized to attack towards Le Kef, and this he did on February with attacks toward Sidi by 21 Panzer Division which had been recalled. Diversionary thrust by DAK units toward Tebessa was held by US 1 Armoured Division.

5. Meanwhile, General Alexandra, who had taken command of the Allied armies, ordered that there should be no further retreat for the Western Dorsa, and began sending units of British 6 Armoured Division down to Butress the defences at Thala and Sbiba. These they reached just as Axis pressure was threatening a breakthrough. By the afternoon of 22 February, Rommel had decided to call off the attack and pull back. The Allies retook

Kasserine on the 25<sup>th</sup>. They had suffered 10,000 casualties, 6,500 from US II Corps, as against only 2,000 Axis troops.

## **LESSONS**

6. The major lessons of the battle of Kassarine can be thus: be summarized as:

- a. The effectiveness of an “Offensive Action”. When Montgomery was not in a position to pose a threat at Mareth line, Rommel disengaged enough troops to attack the Allies to the west inflicting heavy casualties.
- b. The principles of “Economy of Effort” was brought out in the battle, Rommel kept just enough force at the Mareth line to check Montgomery’s advance and used the rest to launch an attack at Kasserine.
- c. The need for unity of commanders; neither Rommel nor Von Arnin was in command and was therefore no unity of purpose since each commander’s thinking was different.
- d. The need for a single aim Rommel’s aim was to break through the Allies defences and Von Arnin’s aim was to improve the Axis defences, none of the aims was achieved.
- e. The effect of concentration of forces; Rommel was able to defeat the Allies, in piecemeal as he was able to concentrate his forces and achieve local superiority at each encounter.

- f. The employment of the principle of “flexibility” as Rommel was able to defeat the Mareth line while at the same time launching an attack at Kasserine at his rear.
- g. The excellent use of the mobility of forces in defending at Mareth and attacking at Kasserine at the same time.
- h. Rommel’s splendid war of opportunity. When Rommel was sure Montgomery was not in position to pose a threat at Mareth he exploited the opportunity and launched an attack.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

### **BREAKING THE MARETH LINE**

1. **Situation.** With the ending of the Masserine battle. Rommel turned back to face Eight Army which was now preparing to assault the Mareth Line. As soon as 15 and 21 Panzer Division were spotted moving south again. Montgomery reinforced his units in the forward positions around Medenine, and Dug in his troops behind minefields and strong anti-tank defensives. His tactical method was to break up any German attacks with artillery and not to involve his armour unless there was actual danger of a

breakthrough. On 6 March Rommel put in attack on a wide front, the main pressure being in the center where the line was held by the British. 131 Lorried Infantry Brigade and 201 Guards Brigade (Map1). Both this and 10 Panzer Division's attack further south were successfully halted by anti-tank fire and by mid-morning the Axis units had pulled back. A second assault in the afternoon was equally unsuccessful, and the Germans fell back with the loss of 50 of their 150 tanks.

2. **Plan.** Montgomery's plan for breaking the Mareth Line was to send 2 New Zealand Division and 8 Armoured Brigade (non called New Zealand Corps) deep around the left flank through the Maymata Hills and north to the Tebega Gap from which they could menace the El Hamma plain. The XXX Corps would then attack the Mareth Line frontally and form a bridgehead through which X Corps' armour could strike towards Galsa and Safax.

3. **Conduct.** The New Zealand Corps launched a successful attack and by evening of 10 February it had closed up to the Tebega Gap while German 164 Light Division began to pull back from the Mareth Line to ward off the threat. During the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>, 50 Division supported by a tremendous barrage, launched the main attack and although a foothold had been formed by morning it was thrown back on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The German 21 Panzer and 164 Light Division were holding the New Zealanders at the Tebega Gap, and on 22 February 15 Panzer Division launched a major counter attack on the bridgehead which severely mauled 50 Division. Montgomery now altered his original plan completely by sending 1 Armoured Division and X Corps Headquarter (General Horrocks) round via the Tebega Gap, while 4 Indian Division made a hook around the Mareth Line. Traffic congestion delayed



**CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

**THE END IN AFRICA**

1. By the middle of April 1943, the axis forces had been pressed into a tight perimeter based on the last hills before the coastal plain around Bizerta and Tunis (Map 2). Determined defence of these hills had halted the Allied First Army, but Eight Army had now pushed up to a position just south of Enfidaville. The nineteen Allied divisions had some division with 500 guns

but only 130 tanks. Allied airpower was now predominant. Alexander gave Eight Army the first attempt to break through in the south, but their attack was contained and made little progress.

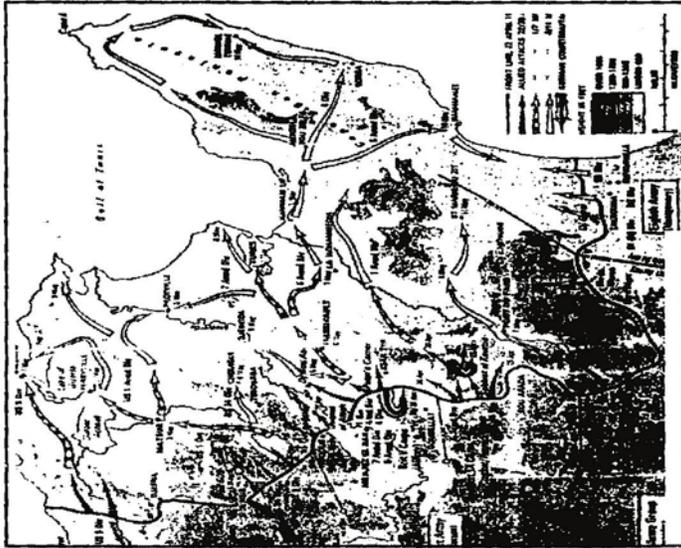
2. A German assault between Goullat and Medjer el Bad on 20/21 April was also held, and on 22 April the First Army launched a series of assaults designed to capture the main remaining hills particularly Hill 609 which dominated the valley which had been nicknamed the “Mousetrap” through which the Americans could reach the plain, and those hills around “Iongstop” and “Peter’s Corner” which commanded the Medjerda valley. By 29 April, USII Corps had made progress towards controlling the Mousetrap, but the other attacks had been halted. Alexander decided to regroup, and transferred 4 Italian Division and 6 and 7 Armoured Division north from Eight Army to IX Corps. He intended that once V Corps had captured Djebel Bou Aoukaz and opened the Mjdjerda valley, IX Corps (now commanded by Lieutenant General Horrocks in place of Lieutenant General Crocker who had been injured) would burst through. While this was taking place, US 9 Division had broken through in the north, and on 1 May was threatening Mateur and the German position around the Mousetrap. On the same day, Hill 609 was taken, but was held until the 3<sup>rd</sup> when the German had formed a new defence line and were still fighting with determination.

3. On the evening of 5 May, Djebe Bou Aoudaz was taken, and early on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 6 and 7 Armoured Division supported by very heavy bombing pushed through into the plain. Their advance was enterprising although the Axis communication had broken down. Tunis fell on 2 May, by which time US II

Corps had broken through in the north and taken Bizerta. The Coastal Strip and Gap Bon were occupied.

4. **Axis Forces Surrender.** The Italian Marshall Messe, surrendered on 15 May. The moonlight advance of 6 Armoured Division from Hamman Lf to Hamman (8 May) was one of the strongest, yet most impressive operation of the war. Without stopping to mop up they drove to the heart of the Axis position, stampeding the enemy into wholesale surrender. This exploit was the brainchild of General Alexander. By 12 May 250,415 German and Italian troops laid down their arms.

## **FIGURE 28: THE END AFRICA**



**CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**

## **PERSONALITIES**

### **FIELD MARSHALL ROMMEL**

1. Rommel sounds so menacing in British ears. General Auchinleck thought about Rommel as a real danger and kind of magician or bogeyman to our troops. “He was a superman and undoubtedly very energetic and able. Even if he was a superman it would still be highly undesirable that our men should credit him with supernatural powers”. He said the Rommel represented something more than an ordinary German General. Rommel succeeded in imposing his personality on his own troops and his enemy.

2. He was born at Heldenhein, a small town in Wurrtemberg near Ulm on 15 November 1891. His father was a schoolmaster. Both his father and grandfather were mathematicians of some distinction. Rommel was anything but tough as a child. He was a very gentle and docile child. He was good tempered, good natured, amiable and friendly. He did not find school too agreeable with him and found himself behind others of his age. He was lazy and inattentive and made no effort.

3. For many years he remained a dreamy little boy showing no sign of the superb physical energy which afterwards developed. He suddenly woke up giving evidence of having inherited the mathematical talent of his father and grandfather. He passed his examinations with credit. He became hard headed, practical and frugal. With his friend Keital, he applied himself to the study of aircraft and built model Airplanes. Keital, decided to become an engineer but Rommel’s father would not let him, so he decided to join

the Army His father was a Lieutenant in the artillery before becoming a school master.

4. As an officer cadet, Rommel became a serious minded young man intensely pre-occupied with doing well in his profession. Examination did not come as easily to him as do the practical side of soldiering and he had to work hard at his books. On being commissioned, Rommel was posted to train recruits. He was thus cut out to be a good regimental officer and in due course, a good hard-driving adjutant. During the 1<sup>st</sup> World war he served first in a field Artillery Regiment and later the Infantry. From the moment he first came under fire while in action against the French in August 1914, he stood out as a perfect fighting animal; cold, cunning, ruthless, untiring, daring quick of decision and incredibly brave. He was twice wounded and three times highly decorated for valour, gallantry and acts of extreme courage. The year between the wars he alternated between regimental duties and command instructional duties at Infantry schools and the war academy.

5. He was posted to command the battalion responsible for Hitler's personal safety in 1938. After the Polish campaign in 1939, he led brilliantly a division into France through the Ariennes in 1940. His success here partly won him the command of the African Corps. When he arrived, Wavell was being over-stretched in North Africa and was dangerously off balance. This is the reason why Hitler hurriedly dispatched 3 Division Panzer Division and one Light Division under General Rommel.

6. In North Africa, Rommel defied Hitler's headquarters instruction not to undertake a decision in North African before 15 Panzer division reached

him in May 1941. He took the advantage of the opportunities and instituted a revolution in the nature and conduct of the desert battle. He might be called a successful military gambler. IN the realm of battlefield tactics, opportunism and gambling can be great virtues. Rommel's boldness, energy, tactics skill, offensive sprit and implacable drive made him introduce blitzkrieg, theory of strategically paralysis by that great practical exponent of it, General Heinz Guiderian in the invasion of French to the desert war. Major General JGG Fuller described the mechanics of blitzkrieg as a psychological weapon; not to move to kill but to move to terrify, to bewilder, to perplex, to cause consternation, doubt and confusion in the ears of the enemy, which rumour would magnify until panic became monstrous". In short, its aim was to paralyze not only the enemy command but also his government and this would be in direct proportion to velocity, rumour is a swift traveler, and panic grows with distance resulting in paralyzing confusion and disorder.

7. The History of Rommel's first rush to Tobruk reflects no credit on the British and their generalship. He made use of his little army pushing up the coast road across the desert driving his division on at great speed in widely dispersed small groups of all arms and then concentrating when it mattered thus causing shock, panic, confusion, rumour and disorder. The German organization, doctrine and training were all peculiarly and purposely designed for this sort of circumstance.

8. Rommel was ruthless and chivalrous. He however treated his enemy with respect. He allowed equal ration of food and water to be taken by POW and his hard-driven troops. He gave medical attention equally to his

troops and those fighting against him. Rommel was a professional soldier who fought for his country with a single-minded purpose, a man of iron nerves and iron physique. He was an admirable leader and one of the best tank commanders that ever lived. The desert fox as he was fondly called remains an enigma even in death.

### **GENERAL MONTGOMERY**

9. May accepted responsibility with ease and this forms the basis of their success. When in the British Army, even in the Sandhurst days, it was said that JUOs and SUOs were appointed not on merit but because of their social attainments, ability at games, money, etc. This is not influence Montgomery. He read extremely, he studied the art of command, the psychology of war and the tasks of the various arms and services. He would talk about the exact technical intricacies of either the Engineers of the Army or Signals above his own arm, the Infantry.

10. Montgomery was always blunt and frank. He spared nobody including the royal family. He was always staying with the troops in the operation when most commanders would rather sit in a luxurious HQ. He had supreme confidence in himself and once he made up his mind he remained inflexible. He was intolerant of opinions, which ran counter to his own. He often called people 'useless' or 'goo plain cook' Montgomery was essentially a field commander. He therefore did not appreciate sufficiently, political and international factors, which sometimes guide top-level decisions. This proved a source of friction between him and the politicians.

11. Montgomery was a showman. He liked being the principal figure on

stage and would rather be the only speaker. All in all, Montgomery was a first class soldier. He made success in North African through which he turned the 18<sup>th</sup> Army from the rot it was during Rommel's arrival to a good, well organized and well discipline force. He always considered the 8 Army as being more of personal properly, and may be here lies the secret of his success.

### **GENERAL WAVELL**

12. General Sir Archibld Wavell was born into an aristocratic family who had a tradition of soldiering. He passed out tops from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and had commanded a battalion in the First World War. His career b etween the war and been mostly spent in assignments in the Middle East. It was therefore not surprising that he was serving in the area as Commander-in-Chief. Middle East responsible for all British interests in North and East Africa the Arab region as well as Iran.

13. When the war broke out Wavell had already written a paper on the strategic interests of Britain in the Middle East and the need for a strong British presence in the area. So accurate was his conclusions that his paper was the basic strategic blue print that the Allies used in prosecuting the North African Campaign. A brilliant strategist and logistician he was always ahead in planning. Wavell had foreseen in 1939 the possibility of the invasion of Libya and had prepared plan for it.

14. Wavell admired Churchill but unfortunately the feeling was not mutual. Wavell was not one of "Churchill's Generals". Churchill found Wavell too cool. Too unemotional and too independent. No matter how

much Churchill tried to conduct the affairs of North Africa by using directives Wavell would carry out only the parts of the directive that he thought were useful and practical. Not surprisingly Wavell was eventually removed. General Wavell, although a brilliant planner, was not a born commander and did not possess that gift of inspiring his men by his presence like Montgomery, Auchinleck or Rommel. He was meticulous and logical in all his actions and was driven more by reason rather than an instinct and was always reluctant to take risks. Wavell had more the qualities required of a staff officer than a commander. He was however dependable and forthright never fearing to speak his mind, but also a true gentleman. The greatest tribute to any commander must be praise by his opposite number and adversary in Battle. This is what Rommel had to say about General Wavell after the failure of **“OPERATION BATTLE AXE”**

*Wavell's strategic planning of the offensive had been excellent. What distinguished him from other British army commanders was his great and well balanced strategic courage, which permitted him to concentrate his forces regardless of his avoiding any operation which would enable his opponent to fight on inferior line and destroy his formations one by one with locally superior concentrations. But he was put at a great disadvantage by the slow speed of his heavy infantry tanks, which prevented him from reacting quickly enough to the moves of our faster vehicles.*

15. Wavell had the unfortunate luck of always commanding in the Allies darkest hours. After his removal from the North African Theatre he went on to command the Allied forces in Burma. He was again removed after the Allies suffered a series of defeat from Japanese. Luck they say play dramatic twists and right company required a combination of good luck, divine intervention and may be the right boss. **That remains one of the**

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**greatest Generals was never easily acclaimed.**