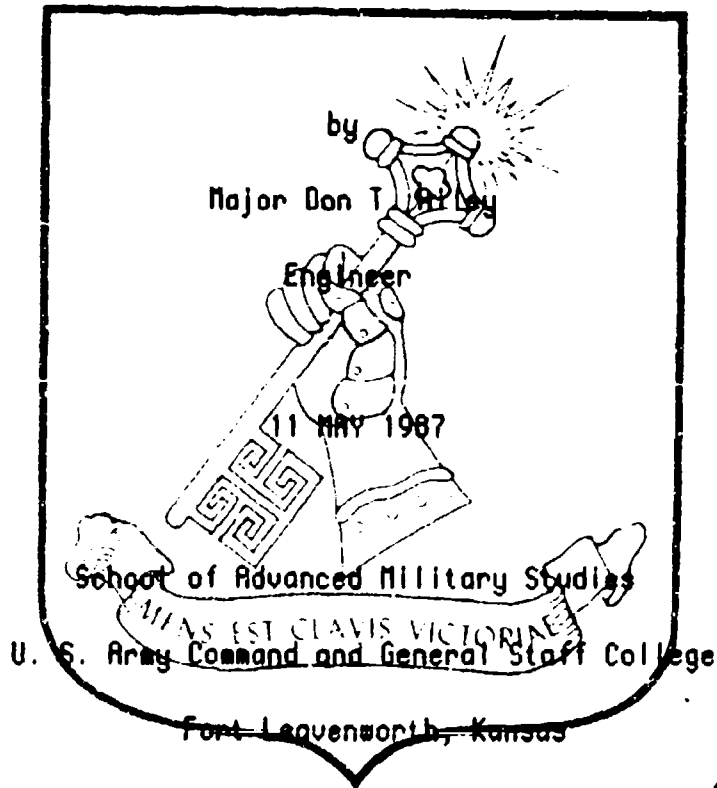


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THE EVOLUTION OF OPERATIONAL ART...
THE RECONQUEST OF BURMA, 1943-1945



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superiority; and strategic, operational, and tactical activities. The conclusion on evolutionary aspects shows how airpower was fully exploited and integrated into an overall campaign plan. Airpower was used for massive resupply and reinforcement, reconnaissance, close support of maneuver forces, and interdiction of supply lines.

Concerning the practice of operational art, orientation on the main enemy force is shown to be central. Also, successful operational art entails taking limited means and stretching them with sound operational methods. In this, logistics and operations are inseparable. Furthermore, a keen sense of the differences between, and interrelationship of, strategic, operational, and tactical activities is important to operational success. Finally, morale is shown to be an important aspect in the balance between aims, means, ways, and risks.


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ABSTRACT

THE EVOLUTION OF OPERATIONAL ART--THE RECONQUEST OF BURMA, 1943-1945
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This monograph examines the evolution and practice of operational art. The campaign for the reconquest of Burma in 1943-1945 as conducted by LTG William J. Slim while in command of Fourteenth Army is analyzed. The intent of the monograph is to evaluate theory in light of historical evidence, with operational art as the focus. The analysis reveals the importance of establishing a clear operational aim and of balancing the aim with means, ways, and risk.

The Burma campaign is analyzed to answer two questions: what does the campaign suggest about the evolution of the operational art and what does it suggest about the relationship between the theory and practice of operational art? The two major operations of Fourteenth Army's campaign are described and analyzed. Slim set the aim of Fourteenth Army in both the Iaphal-Kohima and Irrawaddy operations as the destruction of the main enemy force. To attain this aim Slim stretched his means to the limit, employed sound yet innovative ways, and accepted necessary risk. The analysis includes a discussion of Slim's application of certain theoretical aspects of operational art. These include center of gravity; decisive and objective points; interrelation of offense and defense; decisive battle; use of maneuver to create a force superiority; and strategic, operational, and tactical activities.

The conclusion on evolutionary aspects shows how airpower was fully exploited and integrated into an overall campaign plan. Airpower was used for massive resupply and reinforcement, reconnaissance, close support of maneuver forces, and interdiction of supply lines.

Concerning the practice of operational art, orientation on the main enemy force is shown to be central. Also, successful operational art entails taking limited means and stretching them with sound operational methods. In this, logistics and operations are inseparable. Furthermore, a keen sense of the differences and interrelationship of strategic, operational, and tactical activities is important to operational success. Finally, morale is shown to be an important aspect in the balance of aims, means, ways, and risks.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1942 the Allied forces in Burma were in full retreat in the face of the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia. By May 1942 Burma Corps (commanded since March of that year by LTG William J. Slim) had been driven out of Burma into Imphal of Assam (see map at Encl 1). This paper analyzes the campaign for the reconquest of Burma in 1943-45 as conducted by Slim while he was in command of Fourteenth Army. The intent is to evaluate military theory in light of historical evidence, with operational art as the focus. The campaign is analyzed to answer two questions: what does this campaign suggest about the evolution of the operational art and what does it suggest about the relationship between the theory and practice of operational art? Fourteenth Army's Imphal-Kohima and Irrawaddy operations are described and analyzed in terms of the theory of operational planning. The analysis is structured around the theoretical concepts of aim, means, ways, and risks. How Slim balanced the competing demands of these four concepts in his operational planning is the focus.

The first and most critical aspect of operational art is definition of the aim to be achieved. The current doctrine of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) lists "The Selection and Maintenance of the Aim" as one of its operational fundamentals. It states, "In every military operation, it is essential to select and define the aim clearly. The selection of the aim is one of the commander's most important duties; it demands clear and logical thought."¹ Whether given a clear strategic aim or muddled guidance

the operational commander must translate this into a well-defined operational aim. This is his first responsibility. He must visualize the desired end state and ensure this leads to the achievement of the strategic aim. The planners cannot effectively set priorities and balance competing requirements unless the commander clarifies his criteria for victory. "The aim must be circulated as the needs of security will allow, so that subordinates can make it the focal point in their planning. There must be no doubt as to what the military force is to achieve."² The aim must be set so that the main effort and all supporting efforts can be directed towards its attainment. Thus a clear aim allows for concentration of effort at the decisive time and place. A clear aim also allows for efficient use of means, rigorous planning of ways, and confidence in the acceptance of risk. With a clear operational aim the tactical commander can then design his operations to achieve specific goals. In translating potential combat power he can ensure his victories lead to the success of the major operation or campaign.

The aims cannot be defined, however, without a realistic evaluation of the means at hand. The combat power and the combat power multipliers available to the commander define his means. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this text the means support the attainment of the aims and it is this relationship which determines the feasibility of the aims. The commander who defines his aims beyond all proportion to his means forces the acceptance of unreasonable risk by his tactical commanders and a higher probability of a failed operation. However, means need not be directly proportionate to the

ends. Certain risks are always accepted in battle and innovative ways can redress a lack of means.

The operational plan then designs those ways or methods to be used to employ the means and pursue the operational aim. "The principal task of the theater commanders and their subordinate commanders is to concentrate superior strength against enemy vulnerabilities at the decisive time and place to achieve strategic and policy aims."³ The art in designing the ways then is to balance means and aims. In the hierarchy of activities tactical engagements, battles, major operations, and campaigns are the ways to achieve the strategic aim. The successful operational commander understands the differences and interrelationship of these activities. He ensures the results of tactical and operational actions are linked to the object of the campaign. A commander develops his plan, designing ways to achieve his aim within the means available.

Where means and ways are inadequate to achieve the operational aim risk must be accepted. Acceptance of risk is the part of the equation that is often lightly regarded in planning, leading to inadequate contingency planning. However, risk abounds in warfare and one who has near parity in combat power with his enemy must accept risks in one area in order to be decisive in another. The operational artist economizes force to concentrate force. Failure to recognize this as a necessity predisposes the commander to attempt to be strong everywhere. Lacking overwhelming combat power, this can only lead to failure.

Although each part of this equation of aims, means, ways, and risk is discussed separately for clarity of organization and analysis, it is cautioned that these parts of the equation cannot be considered independent of each other. They interrelate in a dynamic way; one element cannot change without affecting the others. And this is what makes the balance so difficult--the operational artist must consider all at once and not disregard any.

Subsequent to the retreat out of Burma, General Archibald Wavell's Eastern Army, headquartered at Ranchi, India, prepared during the remainder of 1942 and most of 1943 for the Allied reconquest of Burma. Significant ground operations conducted during this period included BG Orde Wingate's Special Force of long range penetration brigades raiding deep into Japanese-held territory; the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) under LTG Joseph Stilwell beginning its advance from Ledo; and attempting a daring, but unsuccessful, counteroffensive in Arakan toward Akyab. Of additional significance, the Allied air forces began to gain air superiority over the theater. During this period of rebuilding and preparation the Allies learned many lessons in fighting the Japanese and would apply these lessons successfully in the following two years.

Throughout 1943 plans for the campaign against the Japanese were discussed at all levels. The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) issued their directive after the May 1943 Trident Conference in Washington, D.C. GEN Claude Auchinleck, newly appointed CINC India Command was directed to prepare plans for operations during the dry weather of 1943-44. His priority was the recapture of northern

Burma to improve the air route and establish land communications with China. Additionally he was to continue preparations for an amphibious operation in the Spring of 1944, build India as a base for the South East Asia theater, and keep China in the war through increased airlift and intensified operations against the Japanese.⁴ Although the strategic aim was ambiguous the priority was clear-- improvement of the communications link to China.

Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed Supreme Commander of the new South East Asia Command (SEAC) as a result of the August 1943 QUADRANT Conference in Quebec. Severe resource constraints resulting from operations in the European theater limited Mountbatten's projected operations to four: "an offensive operation without landing craft in Arakan, an advance from Ledo, operations by Long-Range Penetration Brigades, and a limited advance across the Chindwin River."⁵ In addition to issuing orders to begin planning for these operations Mountbatten discussed operational techniques. He directed his commanders: (1) to fight in the malaria-infested jungles where the Japanese would suffer most (considering their poor system of medical care), (2) not to withdraw if isolated but resupply by air, and (3) to fight during the monsoon to prevent the Japanese from reinforcing unhindered.⁶ Slim in particular listened to this advice carefully and would apply it in his future plans.

In October 1943 Slim was placed in command of Fourteenth Army assuming control of all land operations in Burma. He commanded three fronts--the southern front in Arakan, the central front around Imphal, and the northern front around the Ledo road. Although the campaign for the reconquest of Burma consisted of several major

operations, the analysis in this paper will concentrate on the two decisive operations on the central front at Iaphal-Kohima and at the Irrawaddy River. Both operations provide valuable instruction in the art of balancing aims, means, ways, and risks.

II. IAPHAL-KOHIMA OPERATION

Before considering the execution of the plan it is important to discuss the aims of both belligerents. In January 1944 General Sir George Giffard, the land forces commander commanding 11th Army Group, gave Slim three specific operational objectives and guidance for further planning. On the southern front of Arakan Slim was to seize forward operating bases and exploit south. On the central front he was to move to the Chindwin River southeast of Iaphal near Sittaung and Yuwa, seizing the eastern foothills overlooking the Kabaw Valley and containing the Japanese in this valley, and exploit across the Chindwin if the opportunity presented itself. On the northern front he was to prepare plans for the use of BG Orde Wingate's Special Force in coordination with NCAC.⁷ With this guidance the strategic priority remained the security, maintenance, and expansion of the air and land route to China.

Before planning for accomplishment of these missions Slim clearly defined the operational aim of Fourteenth Army. He wanted seriously to weaken the Japanese before beginning the offensive into Burma. "The only way this could be done was, at an early stage, to entice the enemy into a major battle in circumstances so favorable to us that we could smash three of his four divisions."⁸ So he set

the aim of his initial operation--the destruction of the Japanese Fifteenth Army around Iaphal. He felt this was necessary to meet fully the strategic and operational aims set by his superiors. He translated the terrain objectives given him into force objectives; he continually oriented on the destruction of the main enemy force to accomplish the missions given to him. Thus for Slim the concept of the enemy's center of gravity meant the mass of the enemy's forces. In his treatise On War, Karl von Clausewitz used this mechanical analogy of center of gravity in several ways. In addressing the center of gravity of a force he wrote that a "center of gravity is always found where the mass is concentrated most densely" and he explained, "the *blow* from which the broadest and most favorable repercussions can be expected will be aimed against *that area* where the greatest concentration of enemy troops can be found." (original emphasis)⁹ This same analogy is used in FM 100-5 to explain a key element of the operational art; the essence of operational art "is the identification of the enemy's operational center of gravity--his source of strength or balance--and the concentration of superior combat power against that point to achieve a decisive success."¹⁰ This analogy of the center of gravity of an enemy force applies well in Slim's case. Slim saw the mass of the enemy force as his main objective and he made this clear to his subordinate commanders.

The Japanese defined their aims differently. They fully anticipated an Allied offensive into Burma. Their aim was to prevent this offensive so they set as their objective the seizure of the Allied base at Iaphal. Just prior to this operation they would

conduct an offensive in Arakan to draw Fourteenth Army reserves away from the central front. Then they would attack with their 33d Division to isolate and destroy the 17th Indian Division around Tiddia; with their 15th Division to contain the 20th Division around Tamu and cut the lines of communication (LOC) to and destroy the 23d Division at Iaphal; and with their 31st Division to seize Kohima astride the major Allied line of communication.¹¹ (See map at Encl 2.) These objectives represented decisive points to the Japanese.

A decisive point is defined as any objective that will provide a force with marked advantage over his opponent; and those decisive points which are selected for retention or seizure are called objective points.¹² The means available influence the decision as to which decisive points are attacked. For the Japanese, the 17th and 23d Divisions and the Allied LOC represented objective points. They saw these points as major vulnerabilities of the Allies and would commit their forces in attacking them. The 20th Division represented a decisive point which they elected not to attack but rather contain in an economy of force operation. Another decisive point which they elected not to seize (although a sequel to their plan had called for its seizure) was the Allied supply base at Dimapur. During the operation the Japanese failed to grasp an opportunity to shift their objective point to Dimapur. This was an expensive error costing them one of their few opportunities for victory in this operation. As will be recognized again in the discussion of Fourteenth Army's operations, selection of objective points is a critical step in defining the aim.

Now it is appropriate to look at the means available to Fourteenth Army. Slim had four major maneuver forces under his direction. On the southern front in Arakan was XV Corps commanded by LTG R.F.P. Christison and supported by 224 Group RAF. On the central front headquartered at Imphal was IV Corps commanded by LTG Geoffrey Scoones and supported by 221 Group RAF. On the northern front was the NCAC (Stilwell had agreed to take orders from Mountbatten through Slim) and for deep interdiction was Wingate's Special Force.

Slim felt the ground force means of Fourteenth Army were adequate for accomplishing his aim, but he knew his logistics were severely constrained. As Burma was a secondary theater to Europe and the main Pacific campaign, SEAC was limited by the CCS in both landing craft and air support. The shortage of landing craft precluded any indirect approach by amphibious landing; and land approaches were constrained by the available supply routes and severe terrain which made a more direct approach the only alternative. Fourteenth Army would have to rely on the cart path running west to east from Silchar to Bishenpur to Imphal and the main road from Disapur to Kohima to Imphal for its main supply routes. The aerial supply route to China received the highest priority in the theater so support to Fourteenth Army operations was secondary. This made exacting calculations by the Fourteenth Army staff and overextension of aircraft and crews necessary to ensure resupply of forces. Finally, a shortage of rations and ammunition was the Army's most significant supply problem. Slim expected an

extended operation and he knew his logistics system would have to be strained to its limit to achieve his aim.

Slim considered the morale of his Army as the most important means available to him. Just as it was necessary to build up their supply base before beginning operations Fourteenth Army had to build morale and its state of training after the retreat of 1942. This effort continued throughout the remainder of the campaign. In a talk with one of his units Slim described his philosophy on the morale of the fighting soldier:

But what makes him go on, alone, determined to break the will of the enemy opposite him, is morale. Pride in himself as an independent thinking man, who knows why he's there, and what he's doing. Absolute confidence that the best has been done for him, and that his fate is now in his own hands. The dominant feeling of the battlefield is loneliness, gentlemen, and morale, only morale, individual morale as a foundation under training and discipline, will bring victory.¹³

Slim relied heavily on the leadership of his subordinate commanders to improve the state of morale of the soldiers; he had them begin by building confidence in individuals first, then units. To train soldiers for jungle fighting, Giffard and Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, CINC India Command converted two active divisions to training divisions. This training had as its highest priority the building of individual confidence for fighting and surviving in the jungle. One of the greatest boosts for morale was brought on by the victories, although initially inconsequential, that Wingate's long range penetration brigades had won during 1943 while fighting in the Japanese rear. Slim's operational plan would rely heavily on

the morale and jungle fighting skill of his soldiers and subordinate commanders.

Finally, integral to the means available to Fourteenth Army were the terrain and weather conditions in Burma. The Army had to overcome the terrain difficulties that made resupply difficult. On the other hand, Slim wanted to use the advantages offered by the open terrain in the Iaphal plain. In the open he would be able to concentrate more forces and employ his tanks and close air support to greater tactical advantage over the Japanese. Although the monsoon season which typically began in mid-May would severely constrain operations, Slim planned to use this to his advantage. The Japanese would be most hurt by the monsoon because of their extended positions away from their supply bases--they would either have to withdraw or run out of supplies. Furthermore he planned to push the Japanese hard during the monsoon to wear them down even further.

Slim's operational plan sought a major battle with the Japanese Fifteenth Army as the primary way to achieve the operational aim. Slim saw this operation in the same manner that Clausewitz saw battle. Clausewitz described battle as "a struggle by the main force ... it is a struggle for real victory, waged with all available strength."¹⁴ Clausewitz also prescribed:

a dual law whose principles support each other: destruction of the enemy's forces is generally accomplished by means of great battles and their results; and, the primary object of great battles must be the destruction of the enemy's forces.¹⁵

In seeking such a decision through a major operation Slim's operational role was critical. He had to design ways to set the conditions for tactical success; and he had to orchestrate the tactical victories for operational success--the destruction of the Japanese Fifteenth Army. Slim wrote of his early thoughts on attacking the Japanese in Burma:

The surest way of quick success in Burma is, not to hammer our way with small forces through jungle where the Japanese have every advantage, but to make him occupy as much area as possible, string himself out until he is weak and then, when we have got him stretched, come in at him from the sea and air.¹⁶

His general idea for this operation was to draw the Japanese onto ground favorable to Fourteenth Army, successfully defend against the attacking Japanese to create a force superiority, and then begin his counteroffensive to destroy the Japanese Fifteenth Army. Thus the initial attacker, the Japanese, would end up defending and the initial defender, the Allies, would in the end be the real attacker. The operational offensive would begin with a tactical defense. Thus Slim would first take maximum advantage of the defense then shift to the offense to gain the decision. In consonance with these operations on the central front would be a XV Corps advance in Arakan, an NCAC advance to seize Myitkyina, and a long range penetration by the Special Force to cut the Japanese LOC to the northern front.

Clausewitz wrote of the value of the defense in the same manner that Slim planned to use it on the central front--to buy time. The defender could increase the relative combat power in his favor and then launch his counteroffensive. And this was central to

Clausewitz's argument for the strength of the defense--the opportunity it gives for offensive action. He saw the defensive form of war as "not a simple shield, but a shield made up of well-directed blows."¹⁷ The decisive advantages produced by the defense are surprise, the benefit of terrain, and concentric attack. While surprise and concentric attack are favorable to the attacker, the defender can make greater use of these while having almost the entire advantage of the terrain. All three of these factors interrelate to provide advantages for the defender to seize the initiative from the attacker. The defender can use his knowledge and control of the terrain to launch concealed and concentric counterattacks at the decisive moment. "The defender is better placed to spring surprises by the strength and direction of his own attacks."¹⁸ At Imphal Slim's plan would apply Clausewitz's theory to defeat the initially superior Japanese forces.

All Slim's operational plans were based on the following principles: (1) the ultimate intention was offensive, (2) the main idea of the plan was simple, (3) everyone knew the main idea and all else was subordinate to it, and (4) surprise was used.¹⁹ By basing all plans on the first three of these principles Slim was able confidently to leave the tactical execution of his plans to his subordinate commanders. The Corps commanders were the ones to apply the combat power available and once the operation was set in motion, Slim rarely interfered in tactical execution. He kept his mind set on the operational necessities--ensuring he concentrated overwhelming combat power at the decisive time and place. He

understood his operational role and how tactics, operations, and strategy were interrelated.

In November 1943 XV Corps began a general advance in Arakan. By surprise the Japanese attacked XV Corps in strength on 4 February 1944. On the following day Slim released his reserve, the 26 Indian Division, to XV Corps. By mid-February, XV Corps began their counteroffensive and went on to wrest SEAC's first victory from the Japanese. However, the Japanese offensive in Arakan achieved one of the Japanese' main objectives, the commitment of SEAC's reserves to Arakan. Fortunately for Fourteenth Army, the Japanese failed to capitalize on this by quickly launching their offensive on the central front. They waited more than a month to begin. This gave Slim time to switch his priorities. On 6 March he ordered 5th Indian Division to move to IV Corps and 7th Indian Division to move to Army reserve. On 8 March he requested from Giffard two long range penetration brigades.²⁰

Slim's forecast of enemy intentions was correct but the force and speed of the Japanese attacks around Kohima and Imphal severely disrupted IV Corps' execution of the plan. The first Japanese forces were spotted on 9 March south of Tiddim, but Scoones did not give 17 Indian Division permission to withdraw until 13 March. Further delaying action, the Division did not begin its withdrawal until the evening of 14 March.²¹ But this was too late. The Japanese were able to cut the Division off from Imphal. Slim regretted leaving this decision to Scoones. In this case the tactical event had such a significant operational impact that the operational commander later felt he should have retained the

authority for withdrawal at his level. Slim's primary interest was for the timing of events, Scoones' was for the conduct of events. The operational commander is concerned more with concentration of forces at the decisive time and place while the tactical commander applies the combat power made available to him. Slim's growing recognition of the difference among, yet interrelationship of, tactical, operational, and strategic activities was to serve him well throughout the Burma campaign.

Because of the restrictions of the terrain and their extended LOC Slim had anticipated that the Japanese could attack towards Kohima with no more than a regiment. However, they attacked with a full division and threatened to cut Fourteenth Army off from its supply base at Dimapur. This attack also threatened the communication link to NCRC.

Slim moved quickly to reinforce the central front. He pushed for Giffard to move 5 Indian Division by air. To accomplish this Mountbatten had to divert air assets from the China supply flights. A massive movement began by rail, road, and air of 2 British Division, 5 and 7 Indian Divisions, and 23 LRP Brigade to the central front. Additionally, LTG M.G.N. Stopford with his XXXIII Corps headquarters was moved in from India to take over control of the battle around Kohima. The Japanese plans relied on the successful isolation of IV Corps. However, through the Allied ability to reinforce rapidly by air these plans were critically disrupted.

In early April 17th Indian Division finally linked up with the 23d Indian Division and IV Corps was concentrated within the Imphal

plain. IV Corps was now in position to begin the counteroffensive-- what Slim saw as the decisive stage. Here again Slim exemplified the guidance offered in FM 100-5: "The principal task of theater commanders and their subordinate commanders is to concentrate superior strength against enemy vulnerabilities at the decisive time and place to achieve strategic policy and aims."²² Slim issued orders for a general offensive on both the northern and central fronts to destroy the Japanese Fifteenth Army before advancing into Burma. On the central front IV and XXXIII Corps would conduct a coordinated attack to destroy the weakened Japanese Fifteenth Army (see map at Encl 4). In retrospect, however, Slim felt he should have gathered even more strength before launching the counteroffensive. In March, Wingate had proposed to strike at the Japanese Fifteenth Army's LOC, but Slim did not allow this in order to keep his promise to aid Stilwell with Wingate's force. Slim wrote later that this decision was wrong; that he should have concentrated as much combat power as possible for the decisive battle at Imphal.²³

In addition to aerial reinforcement of maneuver forces, Slim made maximum use of his supporting air forces in the concentration of combat power. The Allies had air superiority at this time in the theater and the air forces operated with little interference. Air operations supported ground operations in several ways: IV Corps was resupplied by air when it was completely surrounded for nearly three months; Wingate's LRP brigades were inserted by air; the Japanese LOC were attacked relentlessly by air strikes; intelligence was gathered on Japanese movements; Slim retained command and

control of isolated units through visits by air; and in close coordination with maneuver forces Japanese front line units were bombarded. Fourteenth Army could not have accomplished its mission without this air support.

Also contributing greatly to the success of the operational plan was Slim's confidence in the fighting spirit and skill of his soldiers. His plan called for attrition over time of the attacking Japanese forces. He wanted to wear them down then attack and use the monsoon to disrupt the Japanese withdrawal. However, he could not have sustained this type of operation without high morale. Likewise, he could not have allowed IV Corps to be surrounded long without knowing his subordinate commanders could handle the difficult situation and his soldiers would fight tenaciously without becoming disheartened. With this confidence he was able to hold to his concept to allow IV Corps to concentrate while XXXIII Corps built up and let the Japanese batter themselves against their defenses at Kohima.

In late April Slim faced an important operational decision. He had to decide priorities for support between the two major battles on the central front. The Japanese continued their assaults on the garrison at Kohima which was now reinforced with 2d Indian Division. Slim felt the crisis was past at Imphal (although IV Corps would still be isolated for two more months), so he shifted priorities for resupply to XXXIII Corps so as to build them up for an advance on Imphal. He was setting the conditions for the success of what he wanted to be the decisive battle. Both Kohima and Imphal

were Slim's objective points but these were only ways to an end--the center of gravity, which was the main enemy force.

By May every division of both Corps was counterattacking. When the monsoon hit, only the all-weather airfields could be used and the amount of supplies going to IV Corps was reduced even further. To assist IV Corps, Mountbatten directed an increase in airlift and an all-out effort to open the Kohima-Impal road. Finally, on 22 June IV and XXXIII Corps met and the road was reopened; supplies began to flow immediately to IV Corps. The Japanese were being pushed back in all areas on all three fronts. Slim's orientation on the mass of the enemy force as the Japanese center of gravity was beginning to produce decisive results.

To complete the destruction of the Japanese Fifteenth Army, Slim ordered the pursuit of 15th and 33d Divisions to the Chindwin. Again Slim stretched his soldiers to the limit. Exhaustion, lack of food (IV Corps had been on half rations during much of its isolation), and illness mainly due to malaria had exacted a serious toll. But he had to exploit the even more serious situation of the Japanese in order to achieve the aim of the operation. The Japanese were in full retreat, they were beaten and out of supplies, and the monsoon constrained their movement severely. By the end of June the Japanese commanders had requested permission to withdraw to the Chindwin; and by the end of July the operation of Fourteenth Army was completed. Approximately 53,000 of the 100,000 Japanese involved on the central front were casualties. Fourteenth Army had suffered approximately 16,000 casualties on the central front, many of whom, unlike the Japanese, would recover to fight again because

of superior medical evacuation and care.²⁴ Slim had achieved his aim--the destruction of the Japanese Fifteenth Army.

Fourteenth Army could not have accomplished this aim without accepting risk to correct the imbalance between ends and means. One of the first tasks of the operational artist is forecasting enemy intentions--and this is the first risk the planner takes. Slim's operational plan depended heavily on an accurate forecast of enemy intentions. Slim anticipated the Japanese attack as he saw indicators of their build-up. Not only did the plan rely on what the enemy would do but also on how they would do it. Slim had learned of Japanese overboldness, their insistence on sticking with the plan, and their reliance on early capture of enemy supplies. This provided the real opportunity for victory. Without taking risk in forecasting, the Japanese could not have been defeated. Fourteenth Army would not have beaten the Japanese in the defense had it not been for the relentless attacks of the Japanese. Fourteenth Army could not have protected its base at Dimapur had the Japanese revised their initial plan to seize Dimapur before Kohima. And Fourteenth Army could not have worn down the Japanese so severely had not the Japanese so lightly regarded their own logistics support.

Additionally, Slim's plan risked encirclement of his forward forces if the Japanese attacked with greater speed than anticipated. This risk was accepted and it was costly. For not only was 17th Indian Division surrounded quickly but the entire IV Corps was encircled. Also, the Fourteenth Army's main LOC was parallel to its front--a lucrative target to an observant enemy. This risk was also

accepted. Slim relied on tenacious soldiers, aerial resupply and reinforcement, and continual weakening of Japanese combat power to overcome these difficulties.

Slim stretched his logistics systems to the limit. Low on supplies and critical aerial transport, he used all he had available. Still this was not enough. He was forced to seek more from the Army Group, and he risked failure of his operation had he not received additional transport and priority for resupply and reinforcement. He knew he must accept logistical risk in order to achieve sufficient concentration of effort.

Finally, Slim took risk by pulling forces out of Arakan early and with his initial economy of force around Kohima. At Kohima he relied on the terrain as a means to make up for lack of forces and accepted risk to the Army's supply base. Once again this was a calculated risk. When the Japanese did attack in strength Slim was forced into monumental efforts and disruption of his plan in order to overcome the threat. Without this economy of force he could not concentrate the necessary forces at the decisive place and time. In retrospect, Fourteenth Army's aim could not have been achieved with only the initial means at hand. Through Slim's inventive ways and his willingness to accept risk he was able to stretch his means to achieve his aim.

III. IRRAWADDY OPERATION

In June 1944 Mountbatten and Giffard prepared their plans for the advance into Burma. The main strategic aim in Burma was to

maintain and expand the communications to China. Giffard ordered Slim to begin planning for southern and central front advances within current resources. On 28 July Giffard ordered Slim to advance in three phases: (1) occupy Kalemyo-Kalewa by air, (2) secure the Shwebo plain by land and air, and (3) liberate Burma down to Pakokku-Mandalay and join with NCAC at Maymyo.²⁵ (See map at Encl 4.)

Slim then set out to plan his operation. His first step was to define his aim. The missions he received from Giffard were all terrain oriented and limited in aim. However, Slim felt the best way to ensure the security of the communications link to China was to clear all Burma of Japanese forces. Although Slim would seize the specified terrain he set his aim as the destruction of the Japanese Army in Burma. For this operation he sought the type of decision which Clausewitz described as resulting from decisive battle. Clausewitz cited, "In 1805 Austerlitz was decisive."²⁶ Austerlitz was a battle between the main forces of opposing armies and it resulted in peace. Through this one victory, Napoleon was able to force peace on Austria and Russia. Destruction of the Japanese Army would end Japanese occupation of Burma. Although this could not be accomplished in one major battle as in Napoleon's day, Slim wanted the Irrawaddy operation to be decisive in gaining control of Burma.

In September at the OCTAGON Conference in Quebec, the CCS redefined their strategic aim. To SEAC they directed: "Your object is the recapture of all Burma at the earliest date. Operations to achieve this must not, however, prejudice the security of the

existing air supply to China, including the air staging post at Mytkyina and the opening of overland communications."²⁷ Clearing Burma would open a land route from the major port of Rangoon to China. This confirmed Slim's plans. Both the object and the priority were clear- ideal strategic guidance. But the aim still had to be accomplished within existing means.

Due to the recent victories and the offensive spirit prevalent throughout Fourteenth Army Slim now had additional means with which to secure his operational aim. Morale had a multiplying effect on combat power. His army was winning and the Japanese were in retreat. His physical means were still severely limited for the task ahead, but the moral force Fourteenth Army could muster was nearly unlimited. Slim could now stretch his army even further than he had at Imphal, knowing it would respond with great effort.

For this operation Fourteenth Army had a force of nearly seven divisions with two more on call from 11 Army Group. However, Slim was constrained by the terrain and the transport available as to how many forces he could support east of the Chindwin. In November 1944 XV Corps and LOC Area Command were placed under the control of 11 Army Group to allow Slim to concentrate his efforts on the central front.

As principal means for execution the terrain and weather again greatly influenced Slim's operational plan, offering both advantages and disadvantages. A significant disadvantage for Fourteenth Army was that after crossing the Chindwin it would have its LOC astride the major obstacle. Also, the attack would be conducted across the dominant north-south grain of mountains and rivers. On the other

hand, advantage lay in the open ground of the Shwebo plain; and this is what Slim saw as the decisive place. The open ground offered the same advantage as did the Iaphal plain for use of air support and armored forces. Additionally a battle in the Shwebo plain would place the Irrawaddy at the enemy's back. As for weather's impact on the plan the monsoon season again weighed heavily in Slim's planning. This time the monsoon was a constraint on Fourteenth Army's operations and it offered relief to the Japanese army. If the Japanese defenses could hold out until the monsoons began, they could then reinforce during the expected lull in fighting. Thus the weather drove Slim's plan--he must complete the destruction of the Japanese Army prior to the monsoon season.

Slim's ways to employ his means were similar to those used at Iaphal. The operational plan sought to fight the Japanese on ground favorable to Fourteenth Army. The original plan was to use maneuver to create a force superiority at the objective point--the Shwebo plain. Here he would attack the center of gravity. This plan was based on intelligence that the Japanese would defend north and west of the Irrawaddy. So Slim set as his main objectives the airfields in and around Yeu and Shwebo. This would give him the capability to reinforce his forward units rapidly and would force the Japanese to fight for these valuable areas which controlled the Shwebo plain. IV Corps now commanded by LTG F.W. Messervy would be on the left and was to breakout of the Sittaung bridgehead, capture Pinlebu and Pinbon, and turn south to seize Shwebo. XXXIII Corps on the right was to breakout of the Kalewa bridgehead to advance towards Yeu and

Nongwa. The Lushai and 28 East African Brigade would guard the right flank down the right bank of the Chindwin towards Gangaw.²⁷

However, Slim had underestimated the Japanese strength. His intelligence estimates had shown an enemy force of 5 1/3 divisions, two independent regiments, and 2 Indian National Army divisions opposite Fourteenth Army. Fourteenth Army would actually face three armies with greater than ten divisions.

IV Corps began its offensive on 4 December 1944 and the movement through the Zibyutaungdan hills progressed much more rapidly than anticipated. Slim had expected heavy resistance at these hills as they offered excellent defensive terrain. Nonetheless, IV Corps continued with minimal resistance to seize Pinlebu and Indaw. Aerial reconnaissance showed Japanese forces crossing the Irrawaddy at Pakokku and other indications showed that most of the Japanese had crossed east and south of the Irrawaddy.

Slim decided quickly that his plan must be changed. For he knew that he could not get the Japanese army into a position favorable to him if he proceeded as planned. He returned to the concept that succeeded at Imphal--a combination of offensive/defensive. But this time he would begin on the offensive and seize a point which he knew the Japanese would fight hard to regain, then defend there. His operational offensive would again use the tactical defense to great advantage. He selected the Japanese supply base at Meiktila as his objective point. The bulk of IV Corps would now move south behind XXXIII Corps to seize Meiktila and XXXIII Corps would seize Mandalay.

Through deception, confusion, and maneuver Slim would create a force superiority at the crossing sites and at the decisive time east of the Irrawaddy to destroy the Japanese army. Operationally he set the conditions for success. XXXIII Corps with elements of IV Corps would move toward the Irrawaddy from Shwebo and Monywa causing the Japanese to believe that Mandalay was the Army's sole objective. IV Corps would then move secretly over the 330 mile cart path from Sittaung to Pauk and cross the Irrawaddy at Pakokku.

Once across the Irrawaddy Slim planned to envelop the Japanese army. XXXIII Corps would draw the bulk of the Japanese army towards their bridgeheads and around Mandalay. This would open the way for IV Corps to seize Meiktila. Slim then expected the Japanese to turn and fight for Meiktila as it sat astride their main LOC; thus the integrity of the Japanese line on the Irrawaddy would be destroyed. At that point IV Corps would defend at Meiktila while XXXIII Corps would strike the Japanese army from the rear. Thus XXXIII Corps would be the hammer and IV Corps the anvil; the mass of the Japanese army would be destroyed between the two corps. At this point Slim would use the offense and defense in simultaneous combination to draw the maximum advantage from each. Slim's operational plan would maneuver the two Corps in such a manner as to set the conditions for success. Tactical execution would then be left to the Corps commanders.

This plan threw the Japanese into confusion. On 24 December XXXIII Corps moved out of the Kalewa bridgehead on the Chindwin and reached Monywa by 14 January. The 19th Indian Division crossed the Irrawaddy on 14 January more than fifty miles north of Mandalay.

The Japanese thought this was a major crossing with three divisions and subsequently committed their reserve to remove this bridgehead, but without success. During this time XXXIII and IV Corps were progressing towards their crossing sites. They began their crossings on 12 and 13 February, respectively. The Japanese were perplexed as to the location of the main effort; they thought the crossing south of Pakokku was simply a feint. Slim had set the conditions for victory.

Once across the Irrawaddy air power took on an increased role in support of the operation. Resupply across the Irrawaddy was difficult and slow. Aerial resupply was restricted by airfield availability so the capture and construction of airfields was the highest priority. The airstrip at Thabukton was seized on 26 February and the 98th Brigade was flown in to reinforce IV Corps' assault on Meiktila. The air forces were being pushed as hard as the ground forces--221 Group RAF "had been exceeding the maximum permissible sustained rules for the past six months."²⁹ Additionally RAF attacks proved successful in disrupting Japanese command and control.

On 1 March IV Corps had the objective point of Meiktila surrounded and after 3 days of heavy hand-to-hand fighting seized the greater part of this Japanese supply depot, rail hub, and main airbase. Slim wrote of Meiktila "It had been intended as the decisive stroke and I had subordinated everything else to its success..."³⁰ IV Corps had succeeded in its initial operational role of cutting the main Japanese LOC. Yet the Japanese commander still didn't know what force had attacked Meiktila for he thought

both XXXIII and IV Corps were north of Mandalay. Thus XXXIII Corps had also succeeded in its initial operational role of drawing the Japanese away from IV Corps. Confused, but knowing he could not sustain his army without Meiktila, the Japanese commander abandoned his plan to concentrate all his forces against XXXIII Corps. He now diverted major forces to the fight for Meiktila while maintaining a large force around Mandalay.

Both corps continued to work in operational harmony. As the Japanese turned to fight IV Corps, XXXIII Corps struck the Japanese army around Mandalay. As the fighting around Meiktila spread XXXIII Corps began a renewed offensive towards Meiktila. As planned, XXXIII Corps acted as the hammer and IV Corps as the anvil at the decisive time and place. Slim wrote: "It was not Mandalay or Meiktila that we were after but the Japanese army, and that thought had to be firmly implanted in the mind of every man of Fourteenth Army."³¹ In this single statement Slim expressed much of the substance of operational art and perhaps the greatest duty of the operational commander. Meiktila and Mandalay were objective points to be seized but only for what they offered towards achievement of the operational aim. Slim oriented his commanders on the destruction of the Japanese center of gravity--the mass of their army--not on retention of territory. Control of ground was only a way to an end. Notwithstanding its importance, establishing the aim and developing the plan is only half the task. The operational commander then must ensure his subordinates know and understand the aim and do not deviate from it. This Slim did with great energy. He recognized his operational responsibilities and knew that once he

set the battle conditions for his corps, success depended on their tactical execution. Then the Corps commanders had to ensure that their tactical activities all contributed to the achievement of the operational aim.

The hammer and anvil plan worked. By the end of March XXXIII Corps completed the destruction of the Japanese Fifteenth Army in the Mandalay plain while Japanese forces to the south continued to batter themselves against the IV Corps defenses at Meiktila. These battles produced a rout of the Japanese; and the Irrawaddy operation succeeded in shattering the Japanese army.

By 17 March Slim had foreseen the success of his operation and ordered his corps commanders to prepare for the next phase--the pursuit. The immediate object of the pursuit was the destruction of the Japanese Army in central Burma and the final objective was the capture of Rangoon. In early April the final operation of the campaign began. The pursuit was completed with the capture of Rangoon on 3 May and the campaign ended with the complete destruction of Japanese forces in Burma in early August.

In this success, Slim had balanced ends, means, and ways with risks. As at Imphal he accepted great risk with his LOC, this time extending the lines across a major obstacle. Due to the lack of rafts and bridges Fourteenth Army had to rely on aerial resupply. Even this was severely disrupted when SEAC was forced to divert a substantial portion of the aircraft allotted to Fourteenth Army to support MCRC. In order to bring the Japanese to battle under conditions favorable to Fourteenth Army, Slim pushed his logistics system and risked a major halt in operations to allow for build-up.

In addition to the Chindwin being an obstacle to resupply it was dangerous to have this river at the Army's back if it was to fight a major battle between the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy. Slim accepted these risks in order to fight on ground where he could concentrate his forces and best synchronize his arms.

Again as at Imphal the plan depended heavily on an accurate forecast of enemy intentions. Although the original plan left little flexibility in execution the agility of the commander, the staff, and their forces overcame any inflexibility in the plan. When it became evident the Japanese intentions were entirely different than anticipated Slim quickly abandoned the plan. Although the new plan took less risk in that enemy intentions could now be more accurately forecast the plan accepted new risks.

Perhaps the greatest risk taken was the dependence of the revised plan on the success of the deception operation. For a deception operation to succeed the enemy must see, believe, and react. One cannot very well fully depend on all correct responses being what he wants. So the risk that Slim took with this plan may have been excessive. But Slim had resolved earlier in the war to take great risks in order to confuse the Japanese:

I had not realized how the Japanese, formidable as long as they are allowed to follow undisturbed their daring projects, are thrown into confusion by the unexpected. I should have subordinated all else to the vital need to strike at them and disrupt their plans ... When in doubt as to two courses of action, a general should choose the bolder.³²

Assisting in the deception were other operations which gave Slim confidence in the plan's probability of success. NCRC was attacking

from the north and drawing Japanese attention: the Allies air superiority allowed them to screen and guard IV Corps' movement; the Japanese had to defend along a 200 mile riverline; and many lower level deception operations were taking place. However, if the massive IV Corps movement south would have been identified and interpreted correctly Fourteenth Army's crossing of the Irrawaddy would have been much more costly. And the decisive battle that Slim sought may never have occurred on the ground of his choosing. He accepted this risk. This plan allowed him to concentrate his forces at the decisive time and place. He saw it as the way to employ the means available to him to achieve his aim.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The most significant evolutionary aspect of the Burma campaign was airpower; its importance and the scope of its role increased in a substantial way. Previously air support had been used in a variety of ways. Prior to World War II some resupply was accomplished by air. In the German blitzkrieg offensives of 1939 and 1940 close air support of maneuver units proved significant. In Africa in 1942 aerial reconnaissance greatly assisted operations. And in Italy and Central Europe in 1943-45 deep air interdiction became a major operation in itself. In Burma these varied air operations were employed as well and synchronized to produce substantial and devastating effects. But new to war was the massive use of air to reinforce rapidly a front with entire divisions, to resupply an entire corps which was isolated from ground

communications, and to speed the advance of an entire army through resupply on airstrips constructed every fifty miles during the advance. Slim took maximum advantage of the air superiority that Easter Air Command had gained. He employed his allotted air assets to the fullest and yet his operations were constrained by the amount of air support he could muster.

The effect of Allied air power on the Japanese was overwhelming. The Japanese could not easily determine Allied intentions as air movement of major forces could rapidly change the situation. They could no longer rely on cutting Allied LOC as a tactical method of isolating units and forcing them to come out of their defenses and fight. They could not rely on the Allies pausing during an offensive in order to bring up necessary supplies. Lastly, Japanese timetables were severely disrupted. They could only move safely at night as large movements by day were difficult to conceal from Allied air. As soon as any large movement was spotted it was targeted and bombarded. In Burma, the use of air power in operational art advanced in a major way.

Much of the essence of operational art consists of balancing aims, means, and ways with calculated risks. And it is a literal balancing act. The operational commander will never have excessive means with which to accomplish his aims. With means negatively disproportionate to the aims the commander must redress this imbalance. He must select an aim and concentrate forces in one area while economizing in others. Experienced judgment is required as the commander is bombarded with indicators, many of them competing, of enemy possible and likely actions. Furthermore, lives of his men

are at stake. So not only must the commander balance competing aims, means, and ways with risks he must do this in the stress, chaos, and uncertainty of battle. We have seen how in Burma Slim did this successfully.

The first and most important step in the operational planning process is the definition of the aim. Slim's strategic aim was clear but limited. For this theater the priority of the CCS was to keep China in the war through securing and expanding the communications link to China and by pressing the Japanese in Burma. Burma was an economy of effort for the CCS--their main effort against Japan was in the Pacific (itself a theater secondary to Europe) with the ultimate aim being Japan's unconditional surrender. In spite of being a low priority effort with concomitantly limited means Slim established an aim which would stretch his means to the limit--one which was bold but would assure the attainment of the strategic object. In the two major operations studied he sought the destruction of the main enemy force facing him. Guiding these objects was Slim's campaign goal of capturing Rangoon and clearing all Burma of Japanese forces.

Orientation on the main enemy force is central to operational art. The mass of the enemy force should be the center towards which the purpose of all activities gravitate. All objective points should lead to this center of gravity. After deciding he wanted to destroy the Japanese Army in the Imphal plain Slim selected the objective points of Imphal and Kohima. These he would retain and the efforts in Arakan, the security of Dimapur, and the engagements on his flanks and rear were all directed towards the destruction of

the Japanese Army around these objective points. Similarly at the Irrawaddy once Meiktila and Mandalay were selected as the objective points the efforts of the air forces, the separate brigades, and the planners were all directed towards one single purpose.

Thus determination of the decisive and objective points is critical to campaign planning. And these must be selected so that they contribute to the aim--the destruction of the enemy center of gravity.

The successful operational artist will take limited means and stretch them with sound operational methods. Perhaps this was Slim's greatest skill. He learned early on in Burma the importance of sustenance to his operations; and he learned that he must be able to fight when isolated. He forced the Japanese to extend their logistics to their disadvantage, relying heavily on air power to strike at their vulnerable LOC. Additionally he knew the enemy and their methods. He identified their vulnerabilities and he attacked them. He defended when he knew the Japanese would attack relentlessly. By doing this he used both offense and defense to their maximum advantage. He cut their LOC when they were desperately needing supplies. And he deceived them when they were susceptible to confusion.

In this process of stretching means with sound and innovative ways logistics and operations are inseparable. A major battle may be the main method with which the commander seeks to achieve his aim but logistics permits him to concentrate forces for the decision. Slim knew this and his operations depended on how far he could extend his logistics. In this he provided an excellent example of

current U.S. Army doctrine: "The most successful commanders have been those who pressed their operations to the very limit of their sustaining power--but not one step further."³³ Once the operations were under way more often than not Slim was concerned with timing and logistics--getting the required forces to the place of decision at the right time.

Where the means fall short the commander must accept risk. At Kohima, Slim attempted an economy of force which led to near disaster. Because of high morale, skillful commanders, and the ability to reinforce rapidly by air he was able to recover. During the Irrawaddy operation he risked the success of his plan on a deception operation. Due to skilled execution, air superiority, and other supporting operations he succeeded. The point is he knew he needed to accept risk in order to achieve his aim. The means were inadequate to allow overwhelming force everywhere and he knowingly accepted risk in order to bring overwhelming force to bear at his objective points.

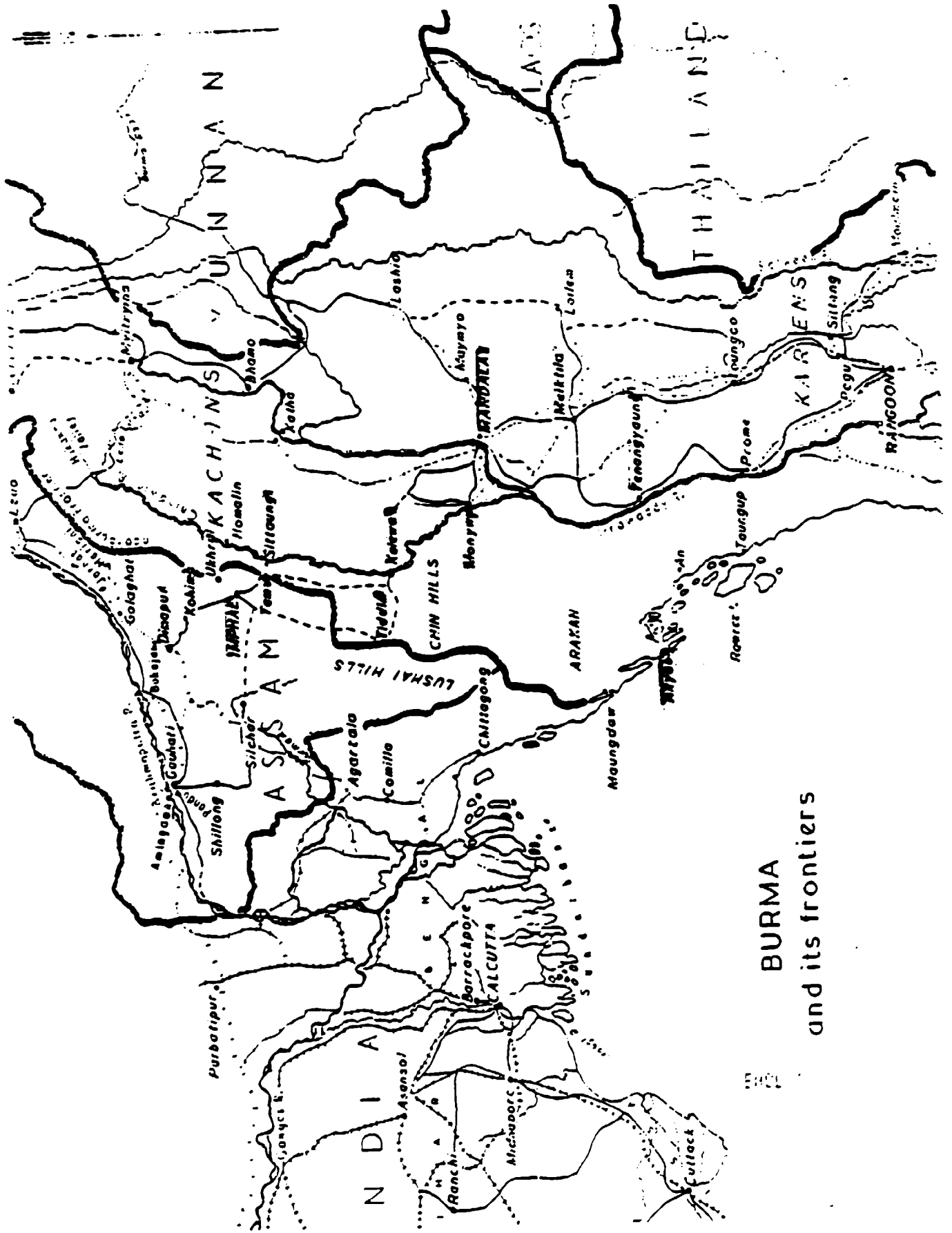
A keen sense of the differences in and the interrelationship of strategic, operational, and tactical activities contributes to campaign success. Slim understood his role in this realm of activities. His job was to design, organize, and conduct a campaign and major operations to achieve the strategic aim. Forces were provided to him by the strategic and higher operational commanders. He had to then balance his resources with his mission and ensure that he concentrated superior combat power at the time and place of decision. Slim effectively set the conditions for tactical success with his operational plan. His corps commanders would then execute

the tactical missions, applying combat power to achieve victory in their battles and engagements. He then effectively linked tactical battles and engagements to ensure the success of his operations. Concomitantly he linked his major operations into a coherent campaign: he used the Imphal-Kohima operation to force a major defeat on the Japanese before entering Burma; he used the advances in Arakan by XV Corps and on the northern front by NCAC to support his central front operations; he used the Irrawaddy operation to destroy the mass of the Japanese forces; and he used the pursuit operation to Rangoon to complete the destruction of the retreating Japanese army. His campaign was successful because his operations all contributed to the aim of the campaign.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, morale is an important aspect of the balance between aims, means, ways, and risk. Slim worked diligently at building the morale of his army. For he knew that to achieve his aim he needed an army with a strong fighting spirit. He set out to instill in his soldiers the "individual feeling of superiority and that first essential in the fighting man--the desire to close with the enemy."³⁴ Without this he knew he would fail. The successful operational commander serves his soldiers best by preparing them for war. This is as much a part of operational command as is defining the aim.

Numerous factors need consideration in operational planning. By keeping the salient factors of operational art in mind the planner avoids being confused by competing requirements; and by first clearly defining the aim he focuses the planning effort. Operational art essentially consists of balancing aims, means, ways

and risks. In Burma, Slim exemplified the successful practice of operational art.

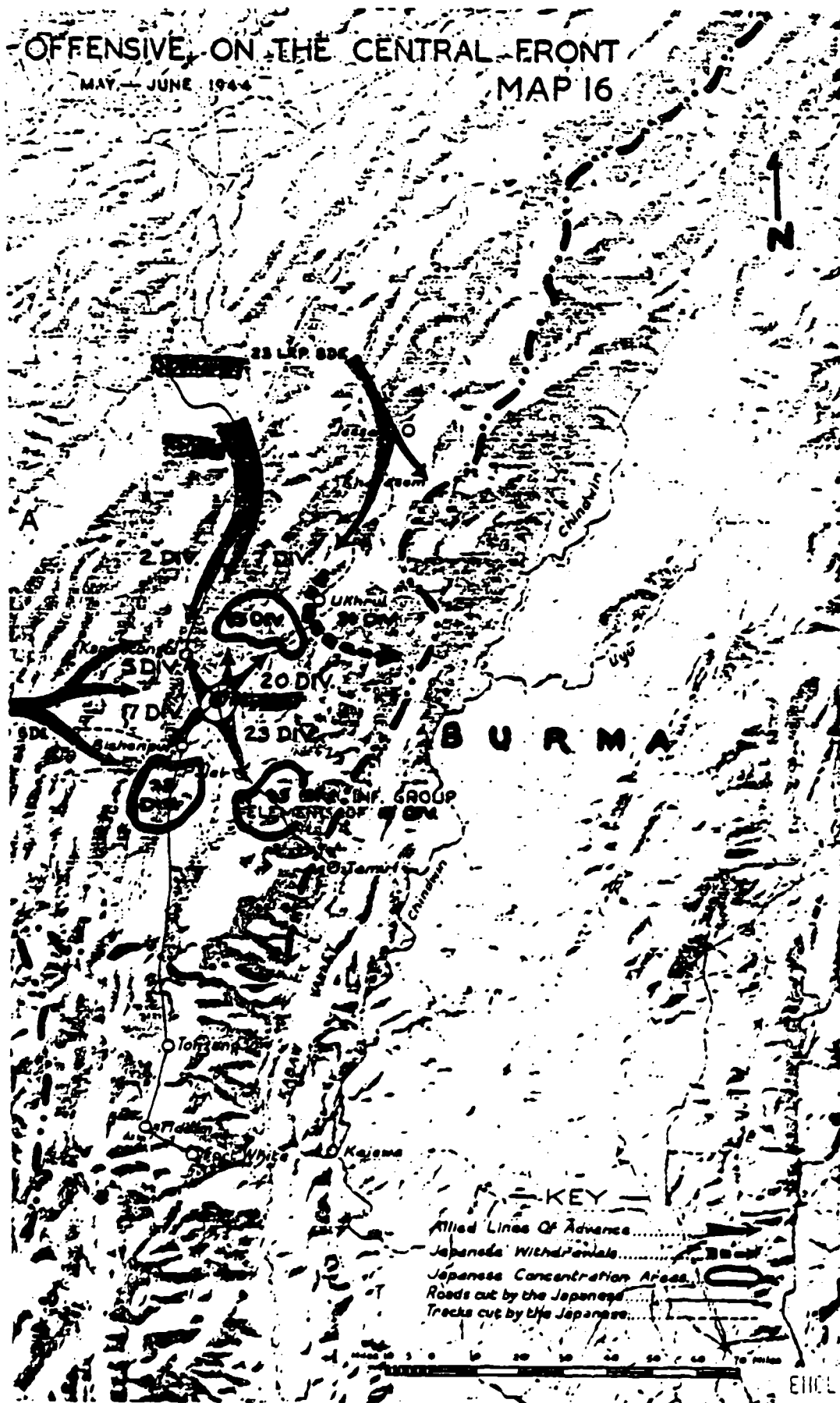


BURMA
and its frontiers

OFFENSIVE ON THE CENTRAL FRONT MAP 16

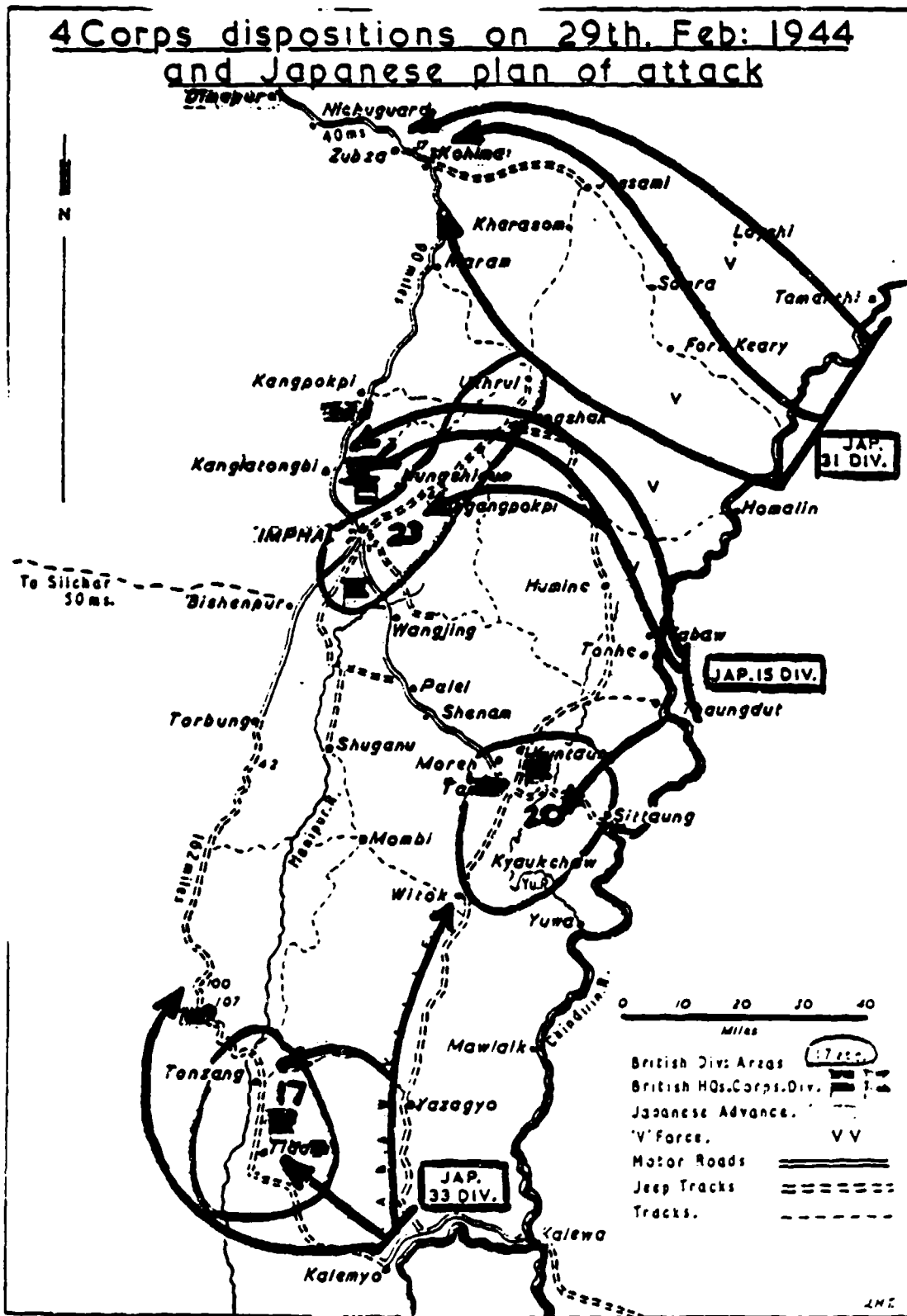
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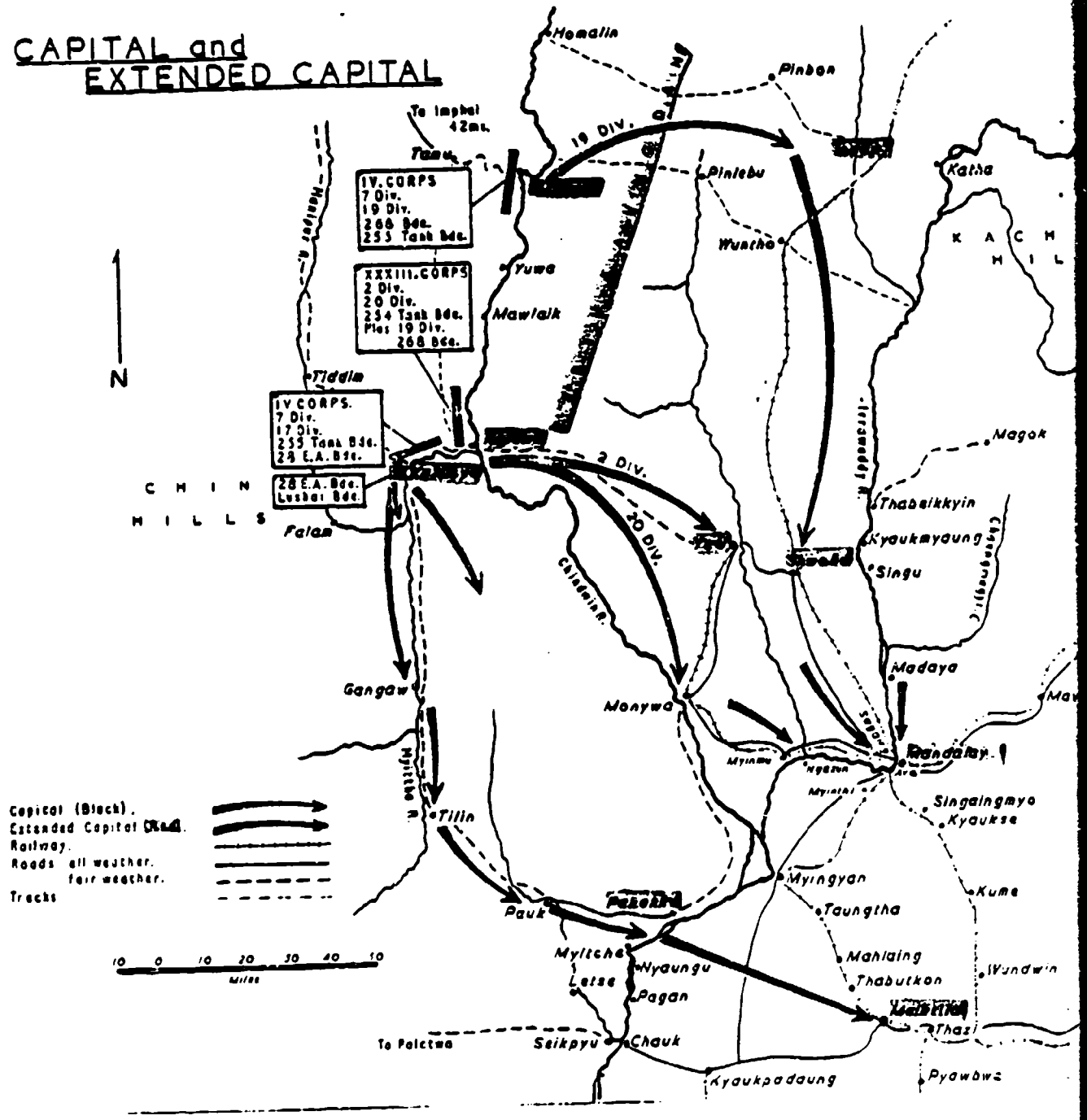


ETHEL C

4 Corps dispositions on 29th. Feb: 1944 and Japanese plan of attack



CAPITAL and EXTENDED CAPITAL



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1. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, ATP-35(A) Land Forces Tactical Doctrine, pp 1-1 and 1-2.
2. Ibid., p 1-2.
3. U. S. Army, Field Manual 100-5, Operations, p 27.
4. Major General S. W. Kirby, et. al., The War Against Japan, Vol II, pp 422-3.
5. Geoffrey Evans, Slim as Military Commander, p 105.
6. Ulce Admira!, The Earl Louis Mountbatten, Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia 1943-1945, p 30.
7. Evans, op. cit., p 119.
8. Ibid., p 215.
9. Michael Howard, Carl von Clausewitz: On War, p 485.
10. U. S. Army, op. cit., p 10.
11. Evans, op. cit., p 125.
12. James J. Schneider, "The Theory of Operational Art", p 26.
13. John Masters, The Road Past Mandalay, p 37.
14. Howard, op. cit., p 248.
15. Ibid., p 258.
16. Kirby, op. cit., p 98.
17. Howard, op. cit., p 360.
18. Ibid., pp 360-1.

19. Field Marshal Viscount William Slim, Defeat Into Victory, p 209.
20. Evans, op. cit., p 147.
21. Ibid., pp 153-5.
22. U. S. Army, op. cit., p 27.
23. Slim, op. cit., p 268.
24. Evans, op. cit., pp 176-7.
25. Slim, op. cit., pp 375-6.
26. Howard, op. cit., p 595.
27. Evans, op. cit., p 180.
28. Ibid., pp 186-7.
29. Mountbatten, op. cit., p 142.
30. Slim, op. cit., p 457.
31. Ibid., p 467.
32. Ibid., p 121.
33. U. S. Army, op. cit., p 74.
34. Slim, op. cit., p 189.

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