

45 (4) 2800

### THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

This is part of one of the most dramatic campaigns in military history - the Jungle war of Burma. I have just returned from this theatre and know what it's like. This is a War in which our aircraft fly and fight on the very roof of the Jungle, bombing and blasting a path forward for the troops who are slogging it out on the ground.

As the 14th Army fight their way into Burma two immense obstacles have lain across their path. One is the jungle covered mountains; the other is the swift running river of the Chindwin. Over the Chindwin - and at this very place - Field Marshal Alexander led the rearguard of the British Army in Burma when they retreated into India 3 years ago. Now it is the Japanese who are in retreat.

There go the first British patrols, following up the enemy. On the far bank of the river they will form a protective screen of infantry and establish a bridgehead. If the enemy should launch a counter attack it is the duty of these troops to hold them off until the bridge is built and the rest of the Army can cross the river. Every soldier carries on his back about 50 lbs. of pack and equipment besides his arms and ammunition. These troops will probably carry 5 days' rations with them too.

The troops were supplied for weeks on end almost entirely by air. Food, ammunition, medical stores, newspapers and letters from home all came down on the end of a parachute. This is what is called a free drop - there are no parachutes attached to these bundles. They are probably bales of hay for the mules to eat. You'd be surprised how much a mule can eat.

48-52001

The tribesmen of the Chin hills help to collect the airborne supplies. They've got so used to the aeroplanes they can pick out the different types miles up in the sky. Now a Dakota means no more to them than the milkcart. The flag of the 5th Indian division flies over Kalewa. They carried it through Abyssinia and planted it on the great Italian fortress at Keren. When they hoisted it on a Burmese pagoda the Japanese gunners shot it down. Our men stuck it up again and this time it stayed up.

We had to build our own bridge across the Chindwin River. The men who built it are Bengal sappers and miners and they finished the job in 24 working hours. A magnificent piece of military engineering. The bridge is of British design, and its parts were made in Britain, India, and the United States. These pieces were then taken to Calcutta, ferried across the Brahmaputra delta, carried by train for a couple of hundred miles up a single track railway. Then they were loaded on to army trucks and transported another 300 miles of jungle track and mountain pass until they reached the Chindwin River. The Japanese were shelling the banks of the river so the pontoons were assembled round the bend and brought into position by motor boat in a few minutes.

Well there it is, the finished job! The first bridge ever built across the Chindwin river, and the largest floating Bailey-Bridge ever built anywhere in this war - 365 yards long. Well done the sappers! Now the guns and wagons and the rest of the Army can get across and go forward to the battle zone a mile or two beyond the river! Motor power and muscle power keep the column rolling forward. There's a lot of stuff to go up and the Japanese may start shelling or bombing the bridgehead again. As a matter of fact they did and you'll see the answer they get in a minute or two.

Now the armour is moving up, rumbling along through the dust. With the tanks go the infantry, British, Indian and African. These men have marched and fought for 500 miles since midsummer.

These are men of the famous 11th East African Division, wonderful fighters from Kenya and Uganda.

45-5

100000

Our ack ack batteries drove off Jap zeros on a sniping mission. The zeros did not hit the bridge, but several of them personally hit the deck.

Now the 14th Army are well established far over the Chindwin. Guns, tanks and infantry are pressing forward into the land beyond the river. In endless columns the 14th Army are converging on the road to Mandalay. There may be 14th Army soldiers here in this audience home on leave from Burma, and if there are they can take this message back - Britain is proud of them.

---