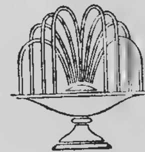
BURMESE OUTPOST

by

ANTHONY IRWIN



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Frontispiece: BURMESE OUTPOST

DEDICATION

To Gretton Foster, Englishman

Book I

To the Mussulman Arakanese and their officers
Archie Donald
Frank Bullen
Pirate Edwards
Dennis Holmes
Bill Holden

Book II

To the British, Indian and Gurkha officers and men who were the first to defeat the " Invincible " enemy,
and to
John Salmon.

Book III

To the Khumis and to Doctor Sweeting, who worked and died for them.

Illustrations by Rex Wood
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FOREWORD

Is there a queer streak in our British character which makes our young men outwardly rebel against the traditions and conventions of our age and race, makes them critical, indeed contemptuous of their " Elders and Betters," of the whole hierarchy of " Higher Authority "—political or military ? They will ridicule experience, regarding it merely as a drag on present and a positive discouragement to future progress. Loyalty to a " Service," to a method, to a tradition postulates a subservicnce to some fossilised system which by the frequent recurrences of war—through unpreparedness, through total disregard of the evolution of nature and the nature of things—has demonstrated its hopeless inefficiency, its blind stupidity, its utter inability to govern wisely, and, rather than perpetuate, by a passive acceptance such a state of affairs, they will say to themselves, " Our fathers have made such a mess of things we must break away, go our own way and do better." A senior officer one day in Italy entered a unit's lines to note with disgust the slovenly irregular turnout and general irresponsible bearing of the young officers and N.C.O.s around him, ridiculously dressed, as many were, in an *abandon* of variety, and on remonstrating with the young men received the immediate retort, " What's it matter, we have won the war for you anyhow." He was taken aback. He might well have replied, " Yes, indeed you have, but you would have won it more quickly had your standards of discipline, self-respect and pride in your Service been higher." Yet there was something in the retort, because these same young men have gone a long way towards winning the war in spite of their apparent irresponsibility and their flouting of the conventions and traditions. By their enterprise, their utter contempt for danger they have proved not only their willingness but their determination to do their duty, even more than their duty. How has this come about ? Is it in the process of kicking over the traces of " authority " ; or is it, in fact, in loyalty to their country and breed, so deep-rooted, that in spite of superficial efforts to conceal

it under a cloak of cynicism and rebelliousness they are carried inevitably along the path of duty to " Service," " King " and " Country " ? Or is it pride or arrant conceit and exhibitionism which lands them in dangerous situations, and lightheartedly into positions of considerable responsibility and importance to the successful prosecution of the war ? Into the service of strange, often hostile peoples, in strange, often hostile lands ? I don't know. The young man who has written this story of " Burmese Outpost " discloses in its pages just this turbulence of spirit, this mixture of rebelliousness, intolerance, consideration, crudeness yet sensitivity and loyalty, which characterises so many of our youth to-day. The reader will come to his own conclusion but he will in any case, I feel sure, appreciate the vividness of the description of life and indeed death in the jungle and in the service of a small but only partially developed section of the British Empire. From personal knowledge and experience of the Indo-Burmese frontier during the bitter days of 1942 and 1943, I can vouch for the reality of this description of conditions in Arakan and the life and loyalty of its native people. The story, once again, demonstrates the happy association which exists in spite of disappointments, defeats and difficulties between the natives living anywhere under the protection of the British flag and the young officers sent to command and serve them.

It was to save him from the troubles into which his restlessness was leading him at home that the author, Major (then Capt.) Irwin, was dispatched to India where he arrived in April, 1943, to report to H.Q., Eastern Army. He had already seen service in France ending with the evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk ; had taken part in the abortive expedition to Dakar in 1940 ; he served with Commandos and the Airborne Forces, but conditions in India were new to him and so to acclimatise him to them he was appointed a " Liaison Officer " on the Army Commander's Staff with the acting rank of Major. It took him, however, only a few days to realise how uncongenial such close contact with higher command and staff was going to be with its inevitably irksome formalities and restrictions, and so, answering the call of the wild, he made friends with some " Guerrilla " officers belonging to an irregular force known as " V " Force, and applied

for permission to join them. This meant giving up his appointment and the higher rank it carried and entering into service in the notoriously unhealthy, inhospitable jungle tracks along the Burmese border, among tribesmen of whose lives and languages he was totally ignorant and in face of, and often within the lines of a cruel and ruthless enemy.

" V " Force had been created originally in 1942 when the Japanese successes in Burma threatened to extend into India itself, and so, all along 600 miles of frontier from the Patkoi Range in the North to the Bay of Bengal in the South, the local tribes were organised to undertake guerrilla operations against Japanese lines of communication, should these pass through their country. After the Japanese advance was halted the activities of " V " Force, whose organisation, arming and training had meanwhile proceeded slowly but surely, gradually changed in character from a defensive, post-occupational role to the more aggressive, active task of patrolling into enemy held territory to get information on which to build the Allied plans for the future recovery of Burma. Over the whole immense area of its activities, covering the country of many and varied tribes, Kachins, Nagas, Manipuris, Chins, Lushais, Kumis, etc., etc. the proportion of British officers to selected tribesmen was of the order of perhaps one per two hundred ; in terms of area, however, their responsibility covered several hundred square miles. They were all young men with little or no experience of the conditions, peoples or languages they had to encounter. In the barren days of 1942 modern weapons were not available even for our regular troops, so for armament " V " Force had to depend on the museums, shops and private owners whence and from whom were drawn any weapons which might prove serviceable, single and double barrelled shot-guns predominating as the main armament. Later, modern rifles and automatics became available to a limited extent to the intense joy and pride of the tribal rank and file.

While the story covers only a small sector of the theatre of operations—i.e. the Arakan—that sector had experienced the full cycle of defeat, partial recovery, renewed disappointment and decisive victory during which its natives, friendly and hostile, Mussulman and Maugh, played their respective parts, but perhaps

in no other theatre has the morale of British and Indian fighting men and their attitude to their conditions and their enemy passed through such depths before reaching the heights. The physical and material unpreparedness of India and her Army to conduct a campaign on their Eastern frontier in 1942 is now historic fact, but it was in the moral and psychological sphere that impact against the Japanese disclosed basic differences in outlook and training which contributed seriously towards our early discomfiture in the campaigns in Malaya and Burma. A feeling of inferiority to the Japanese soldier in jungle combat swept through all ranks. It was in this atmosphere that the forces available for the defence of Burma and India—untrained, hopelessly inadequate for the purpose in strength, organisation and equipment, and practically unsupported in the air—battled in defeat but not in vain : for by their efforts and out of their experiences in 1942 and 1943 the commanders and troops laid the foundation of sound military organisation and training which, with the great resources which became available and in their new-found confidence, enabled the Army to surge forward to victory in 1944 and 1945 and finally explode the myth of the " invincibility of the Japanese warrior."

Towards this high achievement the tribes in and around the fields of battle contributed not a little and as representatives of their faithful and friendly clans no finer will be found than in the ranks of " V " Force.

Nevertheless it is well to ponder over the initial disadvantages which beset a nation whose attitude while preparing for war is so altruistic, and whose approach to war and conduct during war so influenced by the principle of " playing the game," the " old school tie " and " cricket." The power to hate is not naturally in us. The lust to kill is absent. We tend to go into battle as if to a football match. If we lose we bear little or no ill-will. If we win we are generous. This attitude towards an opponent serves well in civilised war and helps to maintain the chivalries of battle, but against Japan it placed the commanders in the field at a great disadvantage, because such an attitude of mind cannot suddenly be changed in a night. Only by long, intense and realistic training can an European Army be made fit to fight the

savage in savage conditions and the author's account of the fighting of the 7th Division in the " Box " in Arakan supports with examples this incontestable fact—a fact we should remember not to forget when passing judgment on the Malaya, Burma and India Campaigns of 1942 and 1943.

But it was in the earliest days of our forward move into Arakan in late 1942 that skirmishes occurred in which the local " V " Force guerrillas became involved in an endeavour to pit their inexperienced, ill-armed strength against the Japanese with the inevitable reverses which tended to discredit them in the eyes of the Regular operational commanders who thus lost faith in the value of tribal co-operation. This view was not shared by the Army Commander who, realising that more had been demanded of the natives than should have been expected of them, resurrected and reorganised the force in Arakan but rather with the primary object of keeping observation on the Japanese and his activities than fighting him. That this confidence in the ability of the Arakanese to carry out these essential duties was not misplaced emerges clearly from the pages of this book.

The hardship of existence in these jungle and mountainous frontier tracts is not exaggerated—the author was himself eventually evacuated from India after over a year's intermittent and finally acute dysentery—but in spite of these hardships, perhaps on account of them, Major Irwin has obviously brought away with him not only happy memories of his Service in Arakan, and the affection of the simple, loyal and humorous minded people who fought the Japanese under his leadership but also a record of service rendered by many of them to the British and Allied cause, which merits recognition by, on past showing, improved administration of the country in the future for the benefit of its native population.

X.

Book One

I HAVE OFTEN been asked why I have spent this war in a thousand and one different units ; why, instead of allowing the Luck of the Draw to order my fate, I have rushed wildly from one flame and plunged into a second. Sometimes this has been answered, quite wrongly for me ; people have not bothered to enquire, but have, unasked, told me ! that the reason lies in my being " A mad sort of bloke," or perhaps, in the less pleasing way, said that it was due to the fact that I can never stick to any one thing for any length of time, inferring a butterfly mind. I hope they are wrong. I think that the reason has been simply an Escape ; an escape into battle.

When I went to France in 1939, I was proud and excitedly happy that I had been selected as one with the advance guard of the Nation. I went with a Crusader-glow in my heart. When I came back from France I felt very differently. I had seen for myself that the stories told me by my seniors of the brutality and sordidness of wars were very true. I no longer felt a Crusader, but rather more like a dustman with a very dirty pile of rubbish to clear away. Then I am asked, why did you run away from the rest of the Corporation dustmen, the Regimental soldier, and become a Commando or a Glider Pilot or a Guerrilla leader in Burma ? The answer is really very simple—selfishness. Selfishness because I preferred to fight the war as hard as I knew how, but with as little mental damage as possible. I knew that I could not feel at ease with myself so long as others were fighting and I sitting on my hunkers. I knew the risk of bodily damage in battle to be far less than that of mental damage inflicted by a prolonged Fabian war. And so I fled to battle, whenever the chance appeared. But battle is a damned hard thing to find. A famous general has said that there were, in a Division of 15,000 men, about 2,000 fools. These fools were the men in the actual fighting line ; the other

13,000 being needed to keep them there. And so when it comes to trying to get to a war front, and from that war front into the forward line itself, a certain amount of difficulty is experienced. This difficulty only added to the necessity of getting there.

But five years of war cannot be experienced without resulting in many mental kinks. One goes through a hundred and one phases ; relatively unimportant things take on vast proportions and the real business of life sometimes takes a back seat. One attains a lopsided maturity and during quiet periods tries feverishly to build up the short leg. I find that the old orders of living become singularly ineffective at times and yet one cannot find a needed replacement. If I had been deeply religious I would have found the unsatisfactoriness of our standard religion an even greater shock than it has been to me. I found that in the early days in France I would pray a little when bombs fell very close. Then suddenly I realised that I was doing a cheap thing because I had so seldom prayed when life was easy. I then vowed that if I got out of France alive I would look deeply into the question of religion. I did and could not find any comfort. The two main features about the life of Christ seemed to me to be His birth and His death. The first held me in no awe, for I had been too close to life to be credulous and the second seemed so small a sacrifice compared to that of the millions who were dying, not for the whole of mankind for all time, but for a few for a very limited period. And yet on the other hand, what was there to replace it? I think now that I have found what I have for so long been looking. I think that there need no longer be an escape into battle. I have found what I consider the three most important factors in the life of one person or of a whole nation : Courage, selflessness and tenderness. To me these are the only things that now matter. I know that I am a coward and singularly selfish and sometimes very far from tender. I know also that if I can ever live for a little while with these three pointers, I have not wasted my life.

In my five years of war I have broken every one of the ten commandments and it gives me little or no satisfaction to know that these were broken as a result of war. Selfishly finding an

outlet caused most of them to be broken. Cowardice caused others and a thoughtless lack of feeling caused the rest.

In Burma I think I discovered the bones of life. There, birds became more important than beer ; people's feelings and hopes and fears became more urgent to me than my own. The little man became more important to me than the discomfort of supporting him. In Burma I think that I discovered my integrity and came near, if only for a little while, to living up to my simple code. Back to-day, amongst the unshelled and unbayonetted war, I wonder if I shall return to those days of distressful doubt.

Thus was this book written. I started it in 1943 in the midst of the jungle and the war, but after a few thousand words had to abandon it in favour of fighting. The bulk of the remainder was done during a period of leave in a Hill Station in the Spring of 1944. Since I arrived back in England all I have done is to attempt to tidy up. Were I to re-write the whole thing it would give a completely false impression of the very thing that I am trying in the back of my mind to put across—the changing mental attitude, the lop-sided adolescence, the back-handed maturity from which every one of us, the under thirties, is suffering. It is not an easy subject to approach for the very reason of its lop-sidedness. It is hard not to make this just another " Personal Record." A personal record lasts as long as a newspaper article and seldom has a ' motif.' I have tried to show clearly to the reader that my ' motif ' is an attempt to show the mind of an ordinary sort of bloke, who likes his little bit of sentiment and flagwagging as well as the next man, and who is not untypical of the thousands of young men who are searching for an anchor, seeking an expression of thought and ideal, loathing war yet diving into it in order to escape it.

Politically we are unsound, for we have not had the time to study the ins and outs of political warfare and so we only see that which is served up to us and that which particularly distresses us. Morally we are pretty lax, and are overimpressed by those who, with money and rank and charm and intellect, flaunt the basic social code of laws. All of us know too much about death and too little of life. We are a cack-handed stratum in society

and we want to find the way out, and only we can find it, unless we are prepared to fall back into a negative non-constructive post-war existence. We distrust our elders, because we feel they led us into these shambles, and yet, because they are a majority and because they still hold the High Places, we have to look to them for guidance. We lack coherent self-expression because our way of living has made it necessary to rush through our words as well as our thoughts. By force of circumstance we are building our lives on shallow, shifting soil ; we want the rock but cannot find it. If we can straighten our wandering thoughts before the post-war period there is some hope for us, but unless we can it may be too late to ensure a warless world for our children, for surely nerves give birth to doubts and doubts to misunderstanding and misunderstanding to war.

One thing this war has most definitely taught us is that there is one vital condition that governs success in battle—an overwhelming superiority of the materials of war in the right place at the right time. The modern weapons are such that no tactics nor courage nor skill can overcome the weight of superior guns and faster aeroplanes and heavier tanks, but there is one thing that can defeat a nation and that is the nation itself. France fell, not because the Maginot Line did not extend to the sea, nor through the Fifth Column, but because the people of France would not allow the adherence to this vital principle of war ; thus the Maginot Line had to be built as a second best, and it destroyed the country because it became a complex. France put her shirt on a horse they forgot to feed. The same question will arise as this war ends, and I wonder often whether we are ready to answer it along with all the other, and more complex and personal questions. I wonder if we have not become too civilised and educated with knowledge to face the post-war life with coherence. We damn Fascism because it is Germanic, and we only see the good in the Russians. There is the good and the bad in both, and if we can sort out the one from the other we can better our state. Yet on the other hand, if we continue with the present ideas of Social Security, what hope have we got of ever being a resourceful country again. The Germans have marshalled their people for the benefit of

the State : we seem to be marshalling the State for the benefit of the people, thus destroying initiative, thus making life so easy that the only mass thoughts will be turned to how more to amuse ourselves—then WAR, for our children.

These are some of the worries of many of us ; worries that we understand but cannot answer coherently. Unless we can find an answer, I won't risk tuppence to insure my son's old age.

*

It wasn't until I had been a week at Teknaf that I came to realise to the full extent the enormity of my position. Here was I, not a month off the ship that had brought me from England, trying to run a Guerrilla cum Patriot cum Spying Force. For the life of me I didn't know how to go about my new job, all I knew was that a great deal was expected of me, and that if I succeeded nothing would be said and if I failed I would quickly be out on my neck.

I landed in India at the end of March, 1943. I went from Bombay to Calcutta by train, taking three days over the journey in the hottest time of the year, with no ideas as to what lay ahead. On this journey two things happened. The first was that I contracted the dysenteric bug which stayed with me for two years, and the second was my meeting with a junior member of the Staff of G.H.Q. This last decided for me my future.

And so it was that within a month I found myself in the line. But here was no ordinary line. I was living in a large and comfortable bamboo hut in the village of Teknaf. Around me stood my men, all four of them, with their arms—one pistol. Two miles across the Naf river lay Maungdaw and in it lay the best part of a Japanese battalion. North of me, ten miles north of me, lay our troops, two companies of Lincolns ; superb fighters, but tired fighters, for they had been all the way down to Foul Point and back again over the last three months, fighting the jungle and disease as well as the Japanese. I did my best to survey my surroundings with calm and detachment but,

though I succeeded well enough throughout the daylight hours, the nights with their noises were never too short.

My initiating ceremony was noticeable for its shortness. I arrived in Arakan one wet and melancholy afternoon. Donald, my new boss, met me at the steamer station, dressed in bush hat and shorts, carrying a shorn-off polo stick and armed to the teeth with knives and guns and automatics. We walked from the steamer, one of those flat-bottomed river steamers that one sees on all the great rivers in Asia, to his H.Q., which lay in a mango grove about a mile away. After about five minutes of walking through the thick clinging mud, I lost one of my shoes. I pulled the other off in a temper and threw it away, walking the rest of the way barefooted. From then on, unless I was going into the very dense jungle, I never wore shoes again.

At his H.Q., Donald introduced me to Gretton and Frank. The latter was a great raw-boned, hard-swearing, hard-drinking old campaigner who had seen service in the Malayan police. The former was an English farmer. Donald himself had been many years in the Burma Police, some of them in the Arakan, and so there was little that he did not know about the country and its several tribes. The party was made up by a fifth person, Edge, who was the Burma Government representative. He and Gretton talked about birds the whole time I was there.

Donald said very little about the job that first day but the next morning he took me into his hut and spoke without ceasing for an hour. At the end of the hour he asked me if I had any questions. I was far too overwhelmed to sort out any one specific question at such short notice and so remained silent.

"All right, then, if everything's clear I'll give you four good men and you can start out to-morrow morning for Teknaf. It'll take you a day to get down there ; send a runner back as soon as you're settled in and remember, we don't expect miracles, but on the other hand we don't like failures."

Just before I left, Gretton came up to me and told me not to worry too much for the first week or so. "Just take things easily and you'll find you'll get into it easy enough. We all had to start like this, it being a newish show and there are only the three of us, you making four now, and we've just got to find

our own way around. And by the bye, there's a bastard in Maungdaw who's been talking to the locals about 'The New Masters.' That doesn't make sense ; there aren't any New Masters ; the old ones aren't gone yet. The King's the Master here. Get that man for me if you can ; Ulli Ahmed's his name"

. . . and I walked out into the rain with my bedding and explosives on the stout shoulders of half a dozen porters and the weight of the world on my own meagre ones.

I tried to remember all that Donald had told me and in my mind to sort out the grain from the chaff, but I found mighty little chaff. I recited to myself the object of The Force, the methods and policy, its strengths and its weaknesses. Firstly he had told me that we were a force of eyes. That was understandable enough for the Army was fighting on a front of many hundreds of miles of stiff and almost impenetrable jungle. The reconnaissance patrol in this sort of country could see no more than the men it was supposed to lead. Pilots could not take advantage of the third dimension of war because the jungle roof was a solid roof. An Army with all the vast paraphernalia of modern war but without eyes. We were the eyes. We led the local tribes and they supplied the eyes. In this way British, Indian, Gurkha troops, Chinese and Americans, and later West and East Africans were led through the jungles of the Indo-Burmese border from China down to the Bay of Bengal. Little parties of tribesmen, all either weaponless or else supplied with Boer War pieces, led by a British officer, usually without even a wireless set, ranged all over this vast area, seeking out the enemy, trying to discover his plans and ambitions, leading regular formations of soldiery, saving the lives of thousands who, without our help, would have been blind and lost in the jungles and hills.

This, then, was my job—the brain behind the eyes, but in the beginning it was a very frightened and inadequate brain. The only thing that kept me within the bounds of reason at all was Donald's parting remark to me : "Trust these people ; trust them with everything you've got and they will never let you down." And so I trusted them with my body and, more important, with my policy. It was the four unarmed and half-

civilised Patriots who dictated my duties to me for the first months or so.

I had been in Teknaf four weeks when Frank came down to see me. He had come to do a pretty unpleasant job and had hoped that I would come with him but when he arrived at my hut, unexpectedly, he found me laid out with dysentery, having managed over the few weeks that I had been in the country to lose two stone in weight. He would not let me come with him but told me what he hoped to do.

About twenty miles behind the Jap lines there lived a local of considerable importance. The enemy thought as much of him as we did and employed him as local Headman for an area which embraced thirty towns and villages. Frank had written to him, but he did not reply. He wanted him to work for us, and what Frank wants he generally gets. So he got into a sampan and rowed across the two miles of water that separated us from the enemy, and in broad daylight paid the gentleman a call. As I watched him go, dressed in a bright red lungyi, blue and white striped shirt, a little white Mussulman hat on his head and a tattered umbrella which hardly covered the Tommy-gun it was meant to hide, I never doubted for a moment that he would come back. He did come back, about 24 hours later, having met the man and received written promise from him of future help. He said little enough about the trip, except that the man had not been at home when he arrived and he had to sit and wait for hours for him. It must have been a highly entertaining wait, for there lay a reserve company of Japs within a mile of him. Actually his first words to me were " How're the squitters ? " and his first action was to have me unceremoniously bundled into hospital. The next time I saw him was a few weeks later, on leave. He had been playing poker with a Maharaja and had relieved him of a thousand rupees.

Of course I met all the types and castes of locals that we had working for us. As the area then occupied by us was almost entirely Mussulman country, it was from the followers of Mohammed that we drew most of our " Scouts " and Agents. The Arakan before the war had been occupied over its entire length by both Mussulman and Maugh. Then in 1941 the two

sects set to and fought. The result of this " War " was roughly that the Maugh took over the Southern half of the country and the Mussulman the Northern. Whilst it lasted it was a pretty bloody affair. Where the Maugh predominated whole villages of Moslems were put to the sword, and vice versa. My present gun-boy, a Mussulman who lived near to Buthjedaung, claims to have killed two hundred Maughs. For weapons they used a great two-handed Dahs, with a blade in some cases four feet long. At first the Maughs had it all their own way, for they were both better organised and better armed, having a fair sprinkling of rifles. But as they pushed North, so they met up against stiffer and more organised resistance and were not only held, but forced to retreat, for they are, man to man, no match for the Mussulman Arakanese. The immediate result to us was that it separated the two peoples into two distinct areas of influence, and it is on these areas that we have to base our whole system of intelligence, and the Jap likewise, for he uses or tries to use the Maughs in the same way as we use the Mussulmen, but fortunately not to the same effect. Added to the fact that the Mussulmen are the more trustworthy and in my opinion the more courageous, is the point that at the moment the Jap has had to fight in an area the Northern section of which is entirely Moslem. We can work in the full knowledge that nine out of ten men in our sector are for us, and that if we ever see a Maugh, he is against us by force of circumstances beyond his control.

I have come to love and respect these Mussulmen. They are liars ' par excellence ' and are out for what they can get. But who is to blame them ; they've done us well enough. They have had to put up with two British withdrawals, and yet they have come back with us and fought, and died with and for us. I sometimes wonder if any other people in like circumstances can tell the same story of loyalty and patience as can these Mussulman Arakanese.

Since I've been with The Force I have taken part in patrol scraps in which these untrained, unarmed and unenlisted ' Scouts ' have stuck by till the end, whilst others, trained, armed, enlisted and proud, have run. They are generally known as

Bengalis or Chittagonians, quite incorrectly, and to look at they are quite unlike any other product of India or Burma that I have seen. They resemble the Arab in name, in dress and in habit. The women, and more particularly the young girls, have a distinctive Arab touch about them. They wear bright red shawls and drapes, and hide their faces from the Unbeliever. They are ringed through the nose and bangled, and have long, straight black hair. As a race they have been here for over two hundred years, coming at first in twos and threes in the days when the Northern boundaries of the Arakanese Empire lay along the southern edge of Portuguese influence and Siam and Burma both brought subject gifts to the Arakan King. They are a hardy and diligent people and not the lazy worker that casual acquaintances dub them. They are desperately untidy in their homes and in their sanitation, as judged by our standards, but compared with their equals from Bengal proper, they are spotless. Their hardiness is broadcast by the fact that 30 per cent of the deck hands of the British Merchantile Marine are Lascars, many of whom hail from this part of the world. I have seen an old man crawl into my hospital with legs long useless as a result of sores that went an inch deep and spread many inches in diameter. He had not come for help, in his ignorance, until his feet would no longer stand him, as he had work to do, and rice to reap. I had a boy come to me with a deep wound, caused by a bull, the night before. The wound must have been at least ten inches in length and the bone could be seen. He had put cow dung and leaves on it and walked fifteen miles to see me. But once they are under proper care they become the world's worst patients. This lad we stitched up and told to stay in bed. I arranged for his food to be brought to him, yet come meal time, he would be up and hobbling down to the bazaar to get his own. On his return, his leg would naturally hurt, and he would set up a moan that could be heard for miles. The first time I came to him and tried to ease the pain, but the second time I sent my boy to tell him that I was out. He at once stopped his howling only to start up again an hour later when he heard me calling for tea.

Another difficulty is trying to get them to believe that a

particularly hard go of fever need not be, and nine times out of ten, is not, fatal. They get it into their fat heads that they are going to die, and it's easier to shift a mountain than it is to get this idea squashed to their satisfaction. If they really manage to convince themselves that they are going to die, no power on earth can prevent it. I remember an uncle of mine telling me about four days, early in the war, that he had spent in an open boat in the middle of the Atlantic. In the boat were about thirty Lascars. They made no complaint, save every now and then a couple of them would shrug their shoulders and die, rather than face the uncertainty and pain of the near future. They died without a whimper, but with so complete a defeat that was terrible to see. On the fourth day a rescue ship was sighted and hope came to them. With this hope came more yells and moans and complaints from the surviving Lascars than there had been over the three previous and hopeless days. When there is no hope in their hearts, and pain in their bodies that they believe to be incurable, they are quiet and of unique patience. When they think there is the slightest hope, and when they feel that a doctor is by to cure them, they become intolerable and helpless.

Ever since I have been down here, I have had to fight with the Army over these Mussulman Arakanese. The Army looks upon them as coolies, as cowards, and is happy to use the word "locals" with a depth of scorn. From the view point of the outsider looking in, this is perhaps a natural characterisation. Certainly these people are frightened of the unknown, as is every backward race. They are naturally suspicious and superstitious. They do not band together in clans but keep to their homes and their small villages, and thus their real fighting strength is unknown. But were they to get together, were they to be regimented and trained, I would go so far as to say that I would as soon take a battalion of them into the fighting line as any other Native Battalion that I've seen or fought with.

They are living in a hostile country, and have been for hundreds of years, and yet they survive. They are perhaps to be compared with the Jews. A nation within a nation, and the apple tree hating the growth of the mistletoe but not being able to destroy it. They are stoic to a degree. No amount of bullying

will make them talk against their will. Bully them and they will shut up like clams. Be kind to them and treat them as human beings and they will prove loyal and intensely hospitable. They laugh a great deal, and wrestle and disport themselves in the cool of the evening. They are cruel in many ways to their animals, but it is the cruelty of a simple people and a bigoted religion. When they kill for food, they cut the throat and let the animal bleed to death. Sometimes death will take half an hour to come to a large bull.

As the war drags on they become less particular in their methods. Often I have shot a bird dead on the wing, and they have run to collect it, and dragging at its lifeless throat have severed the main vein in order to appease their religious scruples.

By some astonishing method, they can tell a Jap from a British aircraft long before I, with five years of war behind me. I send them to watch a Jap road and they will come back and be able to tell the number of vehicles and whether they are old British captured stuff or Japanese proper. No gun worries them, nor any shot, so long as they feel that it is not aimed at them, and they will only feel this if they are actively employed as an integral part in a battle. They love to dress up like us, and to use our kit. If they can find an old civilian trilby hat they wear it, or an old useless mosquito net they use it. Some of my Scouts wear old machine-gun belts round their bellies, others rifle slings. Some wear topees, long since battered out of shape and use by old age and rain. They will go for miles in complete agony, wearing boots, to be like the Sepoys. One man once had his hand shaken by a general, and from that day has always worn about three rows of medals, some upside down, some back to front and obtained from God knows where. It is fortunate that they have never seen a highland regiment, for had they, their lungyis would be worn above their knees.

As scroungers they are second to none. A battle over and a flood of chaps will be into my hut with rifles, tin hats, pistols, even wireless sets. If they see a British soldier lying wounded and lost in the jungle, they will get him in somehow. If they see a Jap body, they will cut off the head and proudly bring it to me, demanding Backsheesh.

Without these people we would have been blind and deaf. With them we have eyes and ears and continual entertainment. They make wonderful material for the fair-minded and farseeing coloniser. They make equally good material for the grabbing, selfish and dishonest moneymaker. Their future is in our hands. We have a chance of making a happy people and a fair state out of the Arakan. Any fairness, any kindness will be repaid us one hundred fold. I wonder very often whether the fairness and help that they have shown us will be repaid as fully as it would have been had the boot been on the other foot.

§

John, a new arrival to The Force, and I have just returned from a fishing trip. Running along the Eastern edge of my house is the great Kalapanzin River. It abounds with fish of every breed and size, or at least it did until we came into the area. For the last fortnight we have been up and down the river, blowing up the fish with gun-cotton, to help the units around us supplement their rations. Yesterday we cleared the last of the good reaches in the safety zone and to-day we were asked to supply a mess for the occasion of the visit of some big bug. Our reputation at stake, we went out about an hour before dusk, armed with tommy guns and slabs of gun-cotton. The tide being on the make, there was no fear of the fish floating into enemy water, for the enemy were less than eight hundred yards away down stream. We arrived at the chosen spot, with our swimmers girding up their lungyis, and were just about to light the first fuse when there was a crash away to the East, followed by that unpleasant, yet safe, long whistle as the shell passed over our heads to fall three hundred yards over. I thought at once of calling it a day, and making for home, but John would have none of it—" Must save face, Anthony," so with unsteady hands I lit the taper and flung the slab into the pool below us. Before the spark had reached the detonator, another crash sent the parrots wheeling madly, and again the long whistle. The crump that followed coincided with the explosion

chaung to the South. At the time of the battle Pirate had five locals with him; all of them stuck it except one, who came running back to my H.Q. to tell a wonderful story of how Pirate had been captured, ten Sikhs killed, and God knows what other horrors. I at once left for the hills, for it is an unwritten law in my Force that if one of us gets into difficulties, all the others who can be spared set out to try and help. If one of us should be caught though, there is little hope, for our future has been assured for us by our enemies—four gallons of kerosene oil to hasten the fire that burns us. As I climbed over the jungle hills, my heart thrashing against my ribs, I wondered morbidly whether the Jap would light Pirate's beard first, or let it catch when the flames from his feet had grown great. Capture is our great fear, and all of us have vowed that it shall never, as long as there is one bullet remaining, occur. On reaching the H.Q. I heard Pirate's familiar roar, " Bring that effing porridge, you Chittagonian effer . . . " and I found him, tired, swearing giant that he is, sitting in his little house, sucking a lime. He seemed neither surprised nor grateful at my coming, and we had breakfast, on eggs and Quaker Oats from his store of luxuries. When I left he was worried at my going, in the knowledge of further long nights of fitful sleeping and days filled with doubt, for he is far from friends, and the Japs are near and in the thickness of the jungle they are at home, with the monkey. It is the uncertainty and the complete absence of security that drags so much on one's reserve. There is always the long walk, perhaps two days, to the nearest friend—the road along which no stretcher can go—the noises, inexplicable, of the jungle night—the complete loneliness, with no man to talk to and no one with whom to fight wordily; but the enemy over the hill, and monkeys.

You need to be nerveless and fearless, a very sincere patriot or else a confirmed escapist. Why else should a man give up rank and pay and comfort for a job that holds out no bunches of flowers? Every man who has come to us has come as a volunteer. Every man, without exception, has lost rank and pay by coming. A man may be a major in a regiment, commanding a hundred men, with little or no real cash responsibilities and little or no real responsibilities anywhere.

I know; I've commanded companies in war and peace. In this job, as a subaltern, a man may command an area about twice the size of Middlesex, he may have as many as a thousand men under him and a cash account of £1,000 a month. He is paid by a thankless Government about eighteen shillings a day. We are responsible for almost every blue pencil mark that is to be found on any operational map in the Arakan. (Blue pencil being the colour with which one marks enemy positions.) I have an area which is covered by a division of fifteen thousand fighting men and about twice that number of odds and sods. Added to our operational jobs, we are continually being landed with such tasks as Coolie Corps, finding porters for units because we know the country. For a month I supplied a brigade with fresh vegetables and meat because the Army system had broken down. Three times I've built, or had built, a complete hospital. I've had to supply labour to build an aerodrome and more labour to build roads. And at the same time I've had to do my own job: getting information; patrolling areas of occupation; leading Army patrols on their first sortie into enemy territory; planning ambushes for the Army; keeping the people on our side with thick slices of bread and butter, to smooth over the sundry crimes of looting and rape that always will occur in an area occupied by any but the highest trained of Forces. All this for a pound a day. But we have no complaint at the moment. We love our England, and we escape into a really genuine liking for Burma and its 1,001 tribes. It is hard to believe, but our enemies know more about us, and think a great deal more about us, than do our own Higher Command. Once a General disbanded the Force. He said that it was because we had served our purpose, but I feel pretty certain it was because he had no jurisdiction over us and being a small man, he did not like the idea of having a force in his area that wasn't under his thumb. At the end of one week he was on his knees to Donald, asking him to recall the Patriots to the flag.

I only remember two staff officers in a year coming down from G.H.Q.; one came down to see a forward unit, complete with arm band and swagger stick, and, holding an officers' conference, asked one question, " Do your chaps need two pairs of boots, or one? "

stance, actually stalagmites from the Imperial caves, bound with cord and embossed with the Imperial Flower of Japan, The Chrysanthemum. The top of the handle is worked in brass, or in some cases gold, with an insignia not unlike the Fleur de Lys. The scabbard is either black enamelled or khaki, sometimes made of bamboo, sometimes of metal. A coloured cord and tassel, attached to the handle, denotes the arm of the service. The whole thing weighs not much less than a service rifle.

No one who has fought the Japs will gainsay the fact that they carry with them, apart from their swords, an amazing mass of stuff. Our chaps will always have a letter or two from home, stuffed into their packs, a photo of the girl friend and odd knick-knacks of personal value. That is human nature ; but these Yellow Men hump the most extraordinary amount of stuff into battle. On the body of a Superior Private (L.-Cpl.) I found, apart from his washing kit, change of clothes, etc., which every soldier in the world carries, a paint brush and a pot of black paint, with which he had covered three great pieces of rice paper with beautiful figures, meaningless but poetical, one being " The smoke from the wood fire reaches the crest of the mountain." Then he had a red seal and some wax. This almost every man has, the seal being his name or initial. In addition he had about a dozen very lovely postcards, bright and modern, and four other postcards that would have shamed Port Said, also about ten photos of himself in uniform, taken back in Japan, and at least two dozen of his family, and his girl friends. Then he had a " Belt of a Thousand Stitches," being a long cummer-bund of white silk, painted with Japanese figures and writing, and covered with little silk stitches, each supposedly put in by a girl friend. Then he had about ten little paper charms, some made of shell of thin bamboo, and like a match-box covered with coloured paper. He carried a diary, which had been scrupulously filled, day by day, for the last year and gave the experts a wealth of information. All in all he was more like a walking bazaar than a soldier. But he was no exception to the rule. Anyone finding a Jap body can be well assured of an entertaining half-hour and a host of souvenirs.

The practice of composing aphorisms is a national one.

The present Emperor enchanted the whole Japanese world soon after he had attained the Imperial Throne by writing one which, to the Westerner, is almost meaningless, but to the Japanese holds untold wealth. His was that " At the foot of the mighty oak tree, shaded by its lofty branches, lie the peasant's sabots."

But then the whole Japanese practice of speaking and writing is very different to ours. The written word is sometimes far more important to them than the same phrase spoken. Their strictly symbolic and artistic lettering is the reason for this. It frequently happens that when two great intellectuals are talking deeply, and weighty philosophic talk is meat and bread to a Japanese intellectual, far more so than with us, one will come upon a meaning that he cannot impart *verbi voci* to his neighbour, so he will draw his meaning and hand the paper across, and all will be understood, though the drawing or symbolic lettering will be strictly original.

§

Yesterday we caught a Japanese agent, a very different type to the normal, being both intelligent and educated. He had been before the war came to Arakan, Clerk to a Police Court, a trusted and tried Government servant. Then, with the advent of the Jap, he had become ambitious and believing the promises of wealth and power that they made, had turned against his old masters, hoping to find promotion with the newcomers. For over a year he had been the leader of the League. This League, set up by the Jap, ran all the Civil Affairs in the territories under the Yellow Man's Arakanese occupation. Originally it consisted of only six men, under a Jap, Captain Kisi. Each of the six had his own particular job. Kala Meah was the leader and head magistrate ; Moulovi Sultan had all the vegetable contracts ; Haddi, the Petition writer, built all the huts and bashas that the Jap required. Another priest, Sultan Ahmed, was responsible to the enemy for coolies. A former British clerk, Kaloo, was Kala Meah's assistant at court, and lastly, Moulovi Hussien was the tax collector, or more literally, O.C. Loot.

The fact that three out of the six were priests needs a little explaining, for I said earlier on that the Priests were most ardent in their hatred for the Jap. And so, in nine cases out of ten, they are, but there are the rotters, and it is on these men that the Jap relies, for a bad priest is still an educated man and in most cases an influential and monied man. So when the Jap wanted a helper, he would look first for an ambitious and unscrupulous Moulovi.

As the Jap occupation forces grew, so the League became larger until to-day it has fifteen members and is all-powerful. The members get little enough pay from their masters but they are given a free hand as regards looting, though in this last they have to be careful for fear of a general uprising against them. The other day the Japs ordered Kala Meah to provide three hundred coolies. Kala Meah passed the order on to Sultan Ahmed, who again passed it on to a local Coolie Mauji (Foreman). The Mauji said that the number was too great and that he could only manage fifty. Despite threats he held to his argument, and so Kala Meah, in the company of Kisi, shot him in cold blood. This caused a strike amongst all the influential elders, which no threats could end. It had a further effect, in that a number of men who had not been loath in the past to earn a living in helping the Japs walked over to our side, with a wealth of good *Khubba*. The League is also responsible for the running of a Jap Scout Force. This is about the most ineffectual Patriot Force that the world has ever seen. To start with, Scouts from this force were sent over into the British lines to spy out the land for the enemy. It is no idle boast to say that this practice came to a hasty end for two reasons. Firstly, because most of the so-called spies came straight to our nearest H.Q. and gave themselves up, and secondly, those who thought they could get away with it, were caught, almost to a man, by our Scouts.

The Japs then employed them as river and road watchers and as counter-espionage against our chaps. This is the job they still perform, to our complete satisfaction. For they are lazy and underpaid, so I pay them! They are related in many cases to our men, and blood being thicker than water, they are

a great deal more use to us than they are to the enemy. Another reason for their not pulling their weight in the service of their present masters is that the League members, feeling themselves underpaid by the Jap, make what they can out of their employees, both by taxation, fines and honest to God extortion. One of the more easy methods of obtaining money is by exchange of the Japanese military currency with the British Crown currency. The Japs have flooded the country with a military tender, but the locals treat it with contempt. The unofficial rate of exchange is three Jap rupees to one British. What the League members do is to draw from the villagers all the British money and give in exchange the Jap money, thus making 300 per cent on every transaction. Another method is to tax or fine a village, say twenty cows, then sell them to the enemy; not that the Japs pay much. On our side of the line we pay one rupee a pound of dressed meat, which brings a fair-sized bullock up to about two hundred rupees. A villager is lucky if the Yellow Men give him twenty rupees of military tender for one cow. But it bites both ways. Rice in Jap territory is from 5-10 seers in the rupee. This means little enough profit for the cultivator, but rice in plenty for the coolie. On our side of the line rice is from two to five seers to the rupee, and the result is the reverse, but then at the moment the Japs hold eighty per cent of the rice-bearing ground. But then again we pay the most fantastic rates to coolies. A sampan wallah, who before the war thought himself rich if he earned fifteen chips a month, now draws ninety—and still complains. A chicken, that once could be bought for a chip, now fetches anything up to fifteen rupees, and I once saw a stupid fool of a mess sergeant try to pay twenty-five rupees, nearly £2, for a cock.

It is very hard sometimes to know what to do with these Jap agents. Some genuinely are bad hats, out for what they can make, or perhaps getting their own back on the British rule for some grievance of the past, but few there are indeed who work against us for any political reason. For the most part the agents that we catch, or those who work against us and who will in the near future be caught, do so purely out of fear or hunger or greed, but mostly fear. The Japs occupy their homes and have

the powers of life and death over their families, so what is there for them to do but to obey, when an armed and determined Jap comes to them and demands their help. I know exactly what I would do if a Jap, armed with a Tommy gun, were to come to me, and I a local, and demand that I lead him and his patrol to X—I would lead him, and so would most people.

But we had to have a ruling and we found a clue in the British Law which says that if one man forces another to steal by threatening his life, than only the first is guilty. But on the other hand, if one man stands over a second with a gun and forces him to kill a third, then both are guilty of murder. And so, working on this rule I always sympathised with a man who was forced to work for the enemy as a coolie or guide, for only in this way could he feed and keep his family alive. But if a man, though forced by the enemy, killed one of my chaps or gave away information to the Japanese which resulted in the death of any of the troops, then God help him, because I never will.

It is not a pleasant thing to see a fellow man, whatever his colour or creed, put to death in cold blood, knowing full well that the responsibility of his death is on one's own head, but that is war and in the interests of victory.

I remember the shooting of one fellow. He was a village headman, of some standing, appointed by the British many years back. He informed the Japs against two of my agents, fellow Mussulmen, and acquaintances of long standing. The reason behind his act was that one of the men had married his sister and had taken her away to a different part of the country to escape paying to the brother-in-law, " protection " money, by which the brother-in-law meant a guarantee of a peaceful married life. If the money were not forthcoming he would get at his sister and wreck the marriage. As a revenge the Headman informed, and the man and his assistant were shot by the Japs as spies. We went after the Headman and brought him back with us to our own lines. He was tried by a Special Judge, who sentenced him to death. The execution was carried out in public, with " Full Military Honours " ! The Japs just plug a fellow through the belly and let him wait to die. When the

COLONEL GRETTON FOSTER, M.C.

sentence was passed the man yelled and screamed and pleaded for a week, but then, on finding that there was no reprieve, he calmed down and went to his death with dignity. He was a fine figure, as he stood with his back against a high bank. Dressed in his best lungyi of red silk, little black coat and Imperial beard, with a fez of red on his head, he waited calmly for the end. Perhaps he was the calmest of us all, as the eight Sepoys raised their rifles to aim at the white patch over his heart. Five hundred murmuring exultant voices were raised as the officer gave the order to fire and he collapsed, a pathetic heap on the red sandy soil. Police had to hold back the crowd from running to get a closer look at the body, as six men lifted the body on to a charpoy, covered it and carried it away to the burial ground. A pistol had been held to his head, perhaps, but he had killed a man, and so he must die. He congratulated the Judge on the fairness of the proceedings just before he went to his death.

§

A week ago it was decided that I should go up to the hills for a spell, and so I bade " Au Revoir " to all the Mussulmen and set off. " Au Revoir " was my idea on the matter but they were sure that I would never return, with the result that for four days my house was filled with locals, bearing all forms of presents and demanding " References " for future employment. Wadji Ulla I found in tears, and my old Jemadar, whom I had sacked many weeks before for taking bribes, came from miles away to say good-bye. At first I rather felt that they were showing such concern at my going, only in hopes that they would get an extra good chitty from me, but when I found at least a dozen behind my house all sitting round in a circle crying their eyes out, I began to see that life really was worth while. These Mussulmen hate the hills and yet twenty of them asked to be allowed to come with me, which would have meant not only the horror, and to them it is horror, of the hills, but also leaving their families and homes. Such is the gratitude of these people towards anyone who works for them or who shows them justice

and who tries to understand them. I felt an awful swine that day, because, though we had done a great deal to help them, we had without doubt made use of them to our own ends, and I wondered as ever what sort of future lay before them.

Just before I left I put two men up for a George Medal. They won't get it—they are only "Bloody Locals" after all!

Despite all my efforts, no one would believe that I was going to return to the plains, though they would not tell me why not. Perhaps it was intuition, for although I did come back for a short while, I never returned in my old capacity amongst them.

§

Before I continue with my own personal experiences I think that a short resume of affairs leading up to the next book would not be out of place.

As I see it the Japanese plan in 1941 was to so engulf the Colonial and Empire footings of the white races in the East as to make it impossible for them to have a firm base from which they could launch any massive strategic counter-offensive.

In the first few months of the Japanese war our enemies succeeded even beyond their own dreams. We were so engrossed in battles nearer home, and the Americans so ill-prepared, that we could give but small attention to our far-flung preserves and so the Japanese were able to complete the initial stages of their ambitious plan without undue interference from us. If they could get Australia to the South they would paralyse any major effort by the Americans, who would be without any firm base of sufficient size anywhere East of their own coastline. If at the same time they could take India to the West they would neutralise any British hopes of a counter-offensive base nearer than South Africa.

The Americans and Australians defeated the Southern tentacle and the British and Indians the Western one.

The Japs understood in 1942, when they reached the Indo-Burmese frontier, that there was little chance of an offensive into India from Burma, as the communications between the two

countries were almost nil, and so they made for the next most obvious and effective doorway into India—Ceylon. In the Spring of 1942, they launched a sea-borne invasion of Ceylon. On 3rd April, 1942, a large force of battleships, cruisers, carriers and escorts was sighted steaming towards the island. By a piece of bad luck they ran straight into an Allied convoy and did great slaughter, and a tiny British fleet of two old cruisers and an aircraft carrier which tried to intercept were sunk. On the Island there was only one brigade of troops trained and mobilised to fight, two squadrons of out-of-date Hurricanes, a few Swordfish and half a dozen flying boats. For two days this minute force of aircraft fought off the hundreds of bombers and fighters that flew off from the enemy carriers. They fought at greater odds than experienced during any day in the Battle of Britain, and for a stake that was as vital. For two days they trounced the Jap, outflying and outfighting him, until at length he drew away, leaving smashed and burnt-out and ditched aircraft in greater numbers than our entire force put together.

After this failure the Japanese Command reverted to their original plan of building up a sufficiently large force on the Indo-Burmese frontier to make a major assault into the great peninsula. Throughout 1942 the Eastern Army, whose operational responsibility ranged from the Chinese border down to the Bay of Bengal—an operational command of over 300,000 square miles and covered in all by five divisions under one Lt.-General, my father—fought to hold off the enemy from India. Fought and succeeded, though in those days we were battling in ignorance against the jungle and disease and against a vastly superior enemy with a reputation for invincibility. The enemy planned to reach India by two main routes—one through Arakan, at the Southern end of the frontier, and the other through the Chin Hills on to the Imphal Plain. All through 1943 he was banging away at the doors and in the rear, making good his communications, until by February, 1944, he thought himself ready for his all-out assault.

His plan seems to have been to attack first through Arakan, annihilating the two British-Indian Divisions fighting there and take Chittagong, a fair-sized port and railhead. As soon as