

## CHAPTER 5

### JAPAN RAL- (THE JAPANESE WAR), 1942-1944

Unsatisfied with the treaty of Versailles at the end of the First World War in 1918, and stimulated by the quest for more room for the German people (a place in the sun), Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler started to expand its territory by overrunning Austria and Czechoslovakia, and on September 1, 1939, Poland. This led Britain and France to declare war against Germany.

Japan, under its dictator General Tojo, formed the Axis powers with Italy under Mussolini and Germany under Hitler. Then on December 7, 1941 Japan declared war on the United States of America and attacked Pearl Harbor. By 1942 Japan had overrun China, French Indochina, British Singapore and Malaya, Thailand and U.S. possessions such as the Philippines, Guam, etc. The Japanese crossed the Burma border in early 1942, took Pegu and Rangoon, and marched north toward Zo country.

The British defense in Burma was too weak to halt the Japanese advance, and they, along with thousands of Indians, evacuated Burma. The condition of the Indian refugees was horrible and pathetic. They had no proper transport, as the railroad was hopelessly overcrowded, and they had no food or clothing. The women and children were desperately exhausted from walking, hunger and sickness. Malaria, parasites, dysentery and cholera befell them in the heat of Burmese open country, and thousands died by day and night.

By early 1942, having successfully driven the British into India, the Japanese occupied Burma east of the Chindwin River. In May 1942 the Governor of Burma fled to Simla and established a Burmese Government, and Zo politicians—U Nu and members of the Chin Independence Party—were freed from Katha jail by the fleeing British. As soon as the Zo politicians were back in Zo country, after crossing the Dry Zone of Burma on foot, they organized the Zo freedom movement. When Japan granted nominal independence to Burma in 1943 the Zo politicians around U Nu declared Zo independence and formed a government with U Nu as its first president.

Japan wanted to win the favour of Asian people and to do so propagated the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In an attempt to win the trust of the Zo people the Japanese freed Zo soldiers of the Burma Army who had been taken captive by the Japanese. These Burma Army regulars and the Chin Hills Battalion later became the backbone of the Levies formed to defend Zo country from the advancing Japanese.

### **Zo Levies**

The recruitment and training of the Levies was under the administrators Stevenson and Naylor, with the objective of building resistance to protect Zo villages. Accordingly, two cadres of Levies, "A" and "B", were established. The "B" Levy "was not normally a professional soldier, though military pensioners were frequently to be found in their ranks. His role was to defend his village effectively. This required firstly that he be armed, and secondly, that he be reliably on call at rotational intervals to ensure that each village possessed a pool of runners from which inter-village messengers or porters could immediately be demanded at any hour of day or night. It followed from the implied divorcement from regular agricultural pursuits that the 'B' Levy, while on duty, had to be rationed and paid. The 'B' Levies numbered many hundreds and, in most areas, could be counted on for as much as or more than they were paid for.

Arming the Levies and supplying ammunition was solved by using flintlock guns. "These arms, for most part, were flintlock rifles, and to the Chins they were the most priceless of all possible gifts Passed down from father to son, and preserved in immaculate condition by both, they now aggregated a powerful arsenal in the hands of men skilled in their use. Gunpowder they had learnt to make for themselves, and a couple of hundred yards of telegraph wire pillaged from the Valley could be cut and fashioned into bullets for a more than sufficient supply of ammunition".

"In the Chin Hills, a fusillade from behind a protective screen of panjis (bamboo spikes) was followed by a fade-away to the next ambush position, where reloading could be done at leisure. In the forties of the twentieth century Japs died in the Chin Hills of wounds inflicted by weapons made before the battle of Waterloo Rifles we provided as and when we could to those trained in their

use; we even distributed shotguns sent to us from India."

"The 'A' Levies were a full-time force, and to a large extent they were still embodied soldiers officially. Many of them were survivors of actions in Burma that had ended in the extinction of their units. Weaponless, and with their equipment lost or jettisoned, they had found their way back to the Hills, with or without detentions in enemy hands en route. Silently, and frequently shamefacedly before their pensioner elders, they had returned to their villages and reverted to agricultural pursuits from which they had been weaned by the recruiting officer years previously. Thus they had remained, in many cases until a Burma Army pay party visited the hills and, with no questions asked, called them to various points along the route and paid them their arrears in full."

The material above is taken from H. Braun<sup>7</sup> who in 1942 was the commander of a Levy Battalion at the Burma—Zo border. When he was stationed in the Fort White area he led his Levies to attack the Japanese outpost at Tahan, which was the first retaliation against the Japanese in Burma. He was then transferred to the Haka area, and when the Japanese drove the Levies from Haka he retreated to West Zoram. From West Zoram he organized the Levy force which drove the Japanese from Zo country, often working behind the Japanese lines.

Burchett<sup>11</sup>, who accompanied General Wingate in his adventure behind the Japanese lines in the Monywa area, wrote; "Within a few weeks of the withdrawal (from Burma) some of these irregulars were already operating in the Chin Hills along the southern Burma-India border. The Chin villagers themselves asked and received permission to defend their hills even before the Levies were formed. Organizers were sent in to contact headmen. Brass gongs and skin drums passed on the news from village to village. Swift, silent Chin runners sped along the narrow hill trails bearing messages, giving assembly points and times."

"Soon these squat, slant-eyed, honey-skinned tribesmen began to gather, bringing with them their beautifully carved flint-locks, which are handed down from generation to generation. They are the most picturesque of all the Burma-hillmen. Their hair is worn long, and coiled up into a top-knot. As often as not the elaborate top-knot is held in place by the quill of the long curving tail

feathers of the "drongo" bird. Every man carries a tiger skin pouch in which he carries the nails and stones he uses for ammunition, and the gun powder that he manufactured himself. Their short, brightly-checked skirts are usually tucked up tightly between their legs, because a man that hunts tigers and leopards can't afford to be caught in a trailing loin cloth. They assembled in the meeting places and their headmen read the message that meant war to the Japs. Small villages should supply platoons, larger ones companies, all under their own chieftains."

Duty for most of the chiefs was to lead their respective clans as company or platoon commanders, as the people preferred to serve under their own chiefs rather than the trained officers of the Burma Army or the Chin Hills Battalion.

Yo and Thado built their home guards around chief Pumzamang, and the Sakte Levies were led by Thawngzakhup of Saizang. Thuamcm, Thianpum, Suanghauthang, Paukam and Lamkhawmang also served as company commanders in the Sizang area. Zanniat and Khualsim Levies were led by the chief of Lumbang and Taikual. Haka Levies were led by Thangthio, Hawlshuh and others, and the outstanding Levy leader Zahu commanded the Levies in the Gangaw area. Young intellectuals such as Thawngcinthang, Vunghsuan, Shiahlwé, Summang, Khaimunmang, Gmzatuang and Pauzakam took part as clerks and guides.

According to Vumkohau, "Most of the able bodied Siyms were already enlisted in the Chin Hills Battalion or that of the Burma Rifles. Some served in the civil services of the local administration, hence those who led the Siyin\* levies were the chiefs of the tribal areas concerned, military pensioners, schoolmasters, civilian clerks, police constables etc. While the men folk fought the Japanese, the Siyin women folk supplied the labour for sending ammunition and supply to the front."

In August 1942 the Levies took their positions along the Zo- Burma border. The Chin Hills Battalion was positioned in the north from Suanglulum to the foothills of Webula, and the Levies defending line ran from Natchaung and Pamunchaung to the Gangaw area in the south.

During the fall of 1942 the Levies collected abandoned rice

---

\*Siyin is a Burmese word for Sizang.

stored in the Kale Valley and transported it to their bases in the hills. By that time the Japanese occupied the area as far as Kalewa, and they were doing exactly the same as the Levies—but their rice was being transported to the south. By the beginning of winter 1942 the Japanese occupied Kalemyo. The activities of the Levies at that time were described by Burchett; "They set about preparing for the Japs, these stout-legged, stout hearted mountaineers. They sent out patrols right into Jap-occupied villages. They ambushed and trapped Jap patrols sent out after them. They established information services, and a Jap could hardly take his boots off or write a postcard to his favorite geisha without the Chins knowing. The Japs were worried They sent out patrols that never came back, or came back carrying dead or wounded with strange wounds from bamboo spikes, or jagged stones and nails fired into them from short range."

"They (the Japanese) bribed other villagers to carry notices and warnings to these recalcitrant top-knotted tribes-people. They huffed and they puffed, but they couldn't bluff the Chins. For supposedly good propagandists, their efforts were amateurish to say the least Here are two of their leaflets,

Our Brethren. All Chin Soldiers.

How you are troublesome with the works under the suppressive and selfishness of English government. Our Japanese troops have determined to attack the British troops those camping in your Chin Hills at present. You are the same race as Burmese and why are you in doubt yourselves about whether to co-operate with us or not? Are you willing to get freedom as Burmese race did before? Do not be too late! Being the same race which are include in Asia, we earnestly advise you to co-operate with us and surrender as early as possible. Delay means Dangerous' We the Japanese troops are willing to help your Chin race as Burmen.

The above notice is a warning to you all before we attack Chin Hills.

(Signed) YAMATA,  
 Commander of the Burma Frontier  
 Japanese Army for Attacking Chin Hills"  
 To all Chin Races, Chin Hills :  
 Our brethren, you all Chin races.

Awaking and rise up now' Its time for your Chin races to cooperate with the present Burmese Government.

Our Japanese have determined to attack the British troops those are now camping at your Chin Hills Therefore we deeply advise you better to co-operate with us now.

Do you know that the British and American Governments have lost heavily their forces during the battles such as Hong Kong, Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, etc.

You all Chin races, being included in Asia, must carry your duties with high spiritedly, to co-operate with us quickly.

(Signed) YAMATA  
Commander of the Burma Frontier  
Japanese Army Attacking Chin Hills."

The Zo levies were not worried by these warnings, and they sent out patrols and established secret hide-outs under the very nose of the Japanese. They worked and patrolled and fought on 45 pounds of rice, 15 pounds of beans, and half a pound of salt a month, with perhaps an odd tiger or monkey thrown in for meat rations They held the Japanese during the waiting months, while the British and American army reformed and retrained in India and China. Due to the activities of the Zo, Kachm and to a lesser extent the Naga Levies, the advance of the Japanese was stopped for more than half a year of precious time.

How thoroughly the Levies knew the movements of the Japanese was to be seen in a diary reproduced by Harald Braun. These diary entries reflect movement of the Japanese in the Kalemmyo area.

- 6-8-42 Bn patrol to Sanmyo seized five rifles and the documents indicative of recent Jap contact
- 7-8-42 Now that villages are able to live on own produce consider it advisable close all main roads to private traders with the plains Believe Japs to have hazy idea our real strength jand consider fog should be maintained (N.B. This was done.)
- 11-8-42 Japs reported intend returning Kalemmyo near future and to have ordered fifty coolies to be ready on their arrival. Also reported to have ordered all rations in

- Kalemyo areas to be sent to Kalewa and have threatened deal with anybody supplying Hills. Kalewa bombed Kalemyo machine gunned during afternoon attacked bursts over Kalemyo visible from No Three
- 19-8-42 Same source reports arrival Kalewa of one hundred Jap women since transferred Mawlaik. (N B. Falam to 4 Corps-'presumably these are HORS DE COMBAT')
- 23-8-42 Unidentified single engine low wing monoplane recede this area from Eastward fifteen forty hours today
- 26-8-42 Mine of 23<sup>rd</sup> pilot reported to have waved red and white flag over No. 2.
- 26-8-42 Two village Levies on recce Kalemyo Tuesday did not return. Reported caught by Japs Kalemyo and sent Kalewa under escort.
- 27-8-42 Both captured Levies escaped from Indainggyi where reported questioned by two Jap officers with ten Jap and Burman troops Fate of one still unknown. Report or other follows
- 4-9-42 Reported killed all points except Kalewa Japs 8 others 10 injured Japs 5. Three LUNDWINS reported sunk including two loaded rations in mouth Ubok chaung Road bridge damaged by same bomb Damage to buildings various but no military significance (N B The above in response to a request from Corps for information on the result of recent air attacks )
- 8-9-42 Repeat opinion leaflet raids giving reliable news will have good effect.
- 17-9-42 R.A.T. after recce planes. Urgent must speed up all reports one or more planes. Special section fighters standing by waiting your reports. (N B The above from Levy H.Q. Falam.)
- 19-9-42 J. W. Munro reports from Yazagyo his escape from enemy territory parties sent bring him in.
- 21-9-42 Jap plane shot down by three British planes near Yuwa.
- 29-9-42 150 large dogs breed unknown brought Kalewa and 500 Thaugdut. Reported to be for use in unspecified antiguenlla role.
- 30-9-42 Single engine Jap monoplane with wireless mast unretracted.

streamlined undercarriage and wings tapered on trailing edge over No. 3

- 1-10-42 3,000 Japs and rebel Chinese Kalewa of whom 1,000 have left for Tamu via Sittaung and possible further 1,000 for Khamti N. of Tamanthi. These troops have with them fierce breed of dog in large numbers. Their role includes a bomb attached to collar All boats going down Myittha being commandeered at Kalewa for transport of troops Large number Japs Kalewa down with malaria.
- 4-10-42 Japs collecting B.B.T.C. elephants Palusawa. Villagers ordered rations to be sent Kalewa at 20 baskets per village. Approx. 22nd 70 motor boats arrived Kalewa with Japs.
- 7-10-42 No. 2/Fort White area reced by Jap plane for about three hours in all.

The traditional Zo method of waging war is by ambush, with ambush positions protected by a liberal plantation of sharp firehardened bamboo spikes tipped with rotting pig's liver. The spikes are normally made in two sizes, shorter ones to impale the foot and longer ones to rip the belly. The spikes, which can cause blood poisoning, are hidden under branches and scrubs and are difficult for a man rushing a defended position to see.

In November 1942 the Haka Levies were attacked about fifty miles from Haka by a Japanese force which advanced from Kan behind a screen of press-ganged villagers. The Levies then retreated to Shimpi which was 40 miles from Haka. At Shimpi the Japanese were repulsed and suffered some 50 casualties at the hands of the Levies. Another Japanese party attacked a Levy position near Dawngva, and the Haka Levies under Joshua Po Nyo, a Karen, retreated toward Haka, blowing the Dawngva suspension bridge on their retreat. The Japanese retreated also as they too had suffered casualties.

On the 23rd of December 1942 the Japanese were relaxing peacefully at an abandoned house in Tahan near Kalemio when Zo Levies from No. 2 stockade (Theizang) attacked. Approaching the Japanese position in daylight, but under the cover of grass and undergrowth, the Levies surprised the Japanese so thoroughly that they panicked. The sentry, who was positioned in a tree, was

shot down, and many others were picked off by gunfire as they ran for cover. In a matter of a few minutes twelve Japanese were killed. The Levies returned to their stockade unharmed. The attack was the first the Japanese had been attacked by the allies since the British retreat from Burma, and the British Broadcasting Corporation announced news of the attack on the 26th of December. Some days later Levies stationed at Suanglulum made another attack on the Japanese camp and were successful.

In February 1943 the Japanese launched an attack on the Ngalzang ridge. Braund<sup>17</sup> wrote; "They came up the Hill shouting in Urdu that they were friends and that the Levies should not shoot." But the Levies ambushed them, causing Japanese casualties. The Levies were then pushed to the top of the ridge by artillery fire, which was being used by the Japanese for the first time in the Chin Hills. The Levies also suffered casualties in the battle.

In early May 1943 the Japanese assaulted No. 3 stockade with a battalion supported by artillery fire, and three platoons of Levies and two regular Gurkha companies were driven back. The Japanese then advanced to Fort White. After five days of fierce fighting the Levies and Gurkhas, who had been digging in at Khuikul (between Fort White and Kennedy Peak), lost Khuikul to the Japanese. The Japanese took Kennedy Peak by September of that year.

At the same time another Japanese force advancing along the Kuai stream took Pimpi and Dolluang and advanced to Kennedy Peak. In the fall of 1943 however Tedim, Haka and Falam were still in the hands of the Levies and Gurkhas. The Haka Levies were stationed then at Lungngo, Haka and Hata. At the end of September 1943, 300 Japanese and 100 Burmese soldiers marched toward Tinthe, and the Haka Levies from Hata ambushed the party when it camped at Netpian Var. The Japanese, who did not expect to be attacked, had no sentries and the Levies were able to throw hand grenades into the Japanese camp. The Japanese reported 132 killed and wounded in the skirmish.

The Japanese force advancing from Pao Var, Runpi and Haiphai area could not be halted by the Chin Hills Battalion and Falam Levies, so Falam was lost on November 7, 1943. On November 11th the Japanese attacked Hranhrmg (Haka) and Hmarlawn with machine guns and mortars, and on November 12 the Japanese entered Haka itself. The town of Haka saw some more fighting

when the Gurkhas attacked the Japanese in the shopping centre with rifles and machine guns and later with their kukris and bare hands.

The Japanese however drove the Levies and Gurkhas to Timit Var. The Japanese did not advance farther than Thlanthlang as their plan was to get to Imphal via Tedim and Tamu. After the successful Japanese attacks the Indian National Army (INA) of Subhas Chandra Bose occupied Haka. The Haka people hated the Indians much more than they hated the Japanese because the INA treated the population very badly. The Levy outpost at Lungngo was never taken by the Japanese, and a patrol sent out to attack it lost nine out of ten men in an ambush by the Levies.

According to Colonel Stevenson, who was the commanding officer of the Zo Levies, the Levies killed 214 Japanese in the first eight nights of ambush. The Levies captured maps, war diaries and considerable equipment. Stevenson gave his tribute to the Levies and Vumkohau in a letter written to Vumkohau in November 1945, when he was serving as additional secretary at the Governor's office for Frontier areas. He wrote, "The loyalty of the Chins to me and my small handful of brother officers passes belief. At a time when the whole might of the Commonwealth was collapsing about their heads they stood firm by our side facing the mortars and machine guns of Japan with shotguns and ancient flintlocks. There was the occasion when Saw Ci and one companion cut up a whole platoon of Japanese in a desperate face-to-face fight on a mountain path. There was a time when the girls of Dolluang carried the packs of our commandos to within 50 yards of the point of battle so that the men could be fresh and fit to fight. There was the time when I took nearly a thousand men and women on a dawn "raid" into the Japanese occupied plains to carry away rice sold to us in secret by friendly Burmese villagers. Chins of all ages, both men and women, accepted danger without hesitation."

"All these things could happen only because the Chins found in their hour of danger leaders among their own people who were capable of facing whatever odds might come, and who were willing to die for their country. There were many fine men among them—the Lumbang Chief Hlurr Hmung, Hon. Lieut. Tai Kual and his sons, Subedar Suak Zam of Dolluang, to name but a

few—but among them all Mr. Vum Ko Hau stood out as the man of the moment. He alone had the knowledge and courage to play dangerous game of bluff which enabled his people to organize under the very eyes of the Japanese commanders the resistance movement which struck them down. I am proud to have served with this brave man and his gallant companions. Their resistance to the Japanese in the critical years after 1942 may well have decided the fate of India, for the infiltration tactics which led to the downfall of Burma were frustrated by their skill as jungle fighters."<sup>97</sup>

### **Zo Soldiers in General Wingate's Guerrilla Army The Chindits**

When the British administration collapsed in May 1942 British and Chinese troops retreated to Kachinland, Zoram and Manipur. The Japanese stopped their advances East of the Chindwin because of their heavy losses and because of resistance by the Kachm and Zo levies. Then Wingate was assigned to Burma. He was a Brigadier in the British Army and a soldier with unusual ideas and tactics. In 1938 he had crushed an Arab revolt in Palestine, and in 1941 he put Haile Selassie back on the Ethiopian throne and captured fourteen thousand Italian soldiers with only three thousand men under him. In June 1942 Wingate's idea of deep penetration into enemy held territory was being considered. Wingate thought, "the Japanese are good in the jungle. No doubt about it. But if they can infiltrate, so can we. We must teach our men jungle fighting and how to infiltrate." Thus Wingate was given some British troops, some Gurkhas, an RAF section of officers, a section of signallers, a mule transport company and a unit of Burma Rifles comprised of Karens, Kachm and Zo soldiers (2/20th Burma Rifles). They were trained in jungle warfare in Assam for six months and marched in February 1943 from Imphal to the Chindwin, crossing into Japanese held territories east of the Chindwin.

For part of his troop General Wingate rounded up Zo soldiers who had withdrawn from Burma to India. Those who had a knowledge of English were used for the ranks. Among those serving in the Chindit were, to name a few, Naik Sonkholian, Havildar Sonkhopau, Havildar Hrangthio, Thiankhokhai, Putpa,

Khamcinpau, Suangpiang, Ngopum, Khaikhomang, Liankhohau, Taikchoon, Ciatwe and Lamunghang. These men were dropped behind Japanese lines in different parts of Burma. Sonkholian, Suangpiang and Liankhohau were dropped at Shwebo, and Khaikhomang and Ngopum were among those sent by submarine to Ramree and Cheduba. Thiankhokhai, Taikchoon and Ciatwe were air dropped east of the Irrawaddy. Suangpiang and Liankhohau operated from Mawchi area in the Kayah chieftainship till the end of the war. Another soldier, Stevens Dokhothawng, served with American troops under Colonel Musgrave in Kokang, Shan country. Many Zo soldiers with the Chindits never returned home, and the first batch which was dropped in October 1942 was nearly wiped out by the Japanese.

Burchett" praised these soldiers, "The Burma Riflemen, because they did not operate as a unit, but were split up amongst the columns, have little mention in this book. Wingate said they were the finest body of men he had ever had under his command, and other officers pay equally glowing tributes. These stouthearted Burma Riflemen are officered by former civilians from Burma : men from rice and teak firms; from the mines and trading houses. Without exception, the officers spoke the language of the country and liked the people. Relations between them and the men were excellent, because there was mutual respect, and the officers understood their likes and dislikes. Every British soldier in the Wingate force pays the highest tribute to the Burma Riflemen and acknowledges that without him the expedition would have been a dismal failure."

"It was the Burma Riflemen who always went ahead to collect information, to spy out the land, to make contact with the villagers for food and boats. When groups were near to starving or dying of thirst, it was the Burma Riflemen who time and again saved them by producing water from the hollow stem of the giant bamboo, food from the leaves of the tamarind tree, the young shoots of gourd or pumpkin vines, the leaves of yams. They collected fungi and showed how locusts, rats, and monkeys can be turned into palatable stews and grills." In fighting too the Burma Riflemen were 'eager, courageous and intelligent, and it was often their knowledge of the jungle that made successful ambushes possible.

"To most of the men who took part it seemed they had done

little else but march, march, march, without getting anywhere in particular, then turn round and march, march, march, again back to India. Sure, they blew a few bridges, cut the railway line, fought a few battles, but everything seemed rather pointless." "From a strictly operational point of view, the results were not spectacular. They put the main railway out of commission for several weeks by cutting the line and blowing the great Bonchaung Gorge. They killed a number of Japs directly and many more through information given to the R. A.F. And that was about all."

"But they did tie down a force between four or five times as great as their own, and forced Jap headquarters to call off operations which had already started. The Japs pulled back troops from Tengyueh, and thus the Chinese defeated them when they attempted to take the Mamien Pass west of the Salween. They called off operations against the Northern Kachin Levies. After one futile crack against the Chinese guarding the Ledo road project, the Japs gave up and rushed the troops which they had boasted were going to march along the Ledo road to India down to protect the Mandalay-Myitkyina Railway. The patrols which were gathered in the Homalin area for infiltration across the Chindwin were pulled back, and divided into smaller patrols to roam the forests between the Mu and Chindwin rivers, and prevent the Wingate men returning. A move planned against the Chin Levies was postponed until June, by which time the Levies, greatly strengthened by British regular forces, threw them back with heavy losses."

### **Japanese Advance to Tedim**

At the end of 1943 the 33rd Imperial Japanese Army under Lt. General Yanagida continued advancing toward Khuikul and Kennedy Peak against the Gurkhas and the Levies. At Tedim in March 1944 the British 17th Indian Division under General Cowan was recapturing some lost ground and operating with increasing success. But the condition of this local war changed abruptly. A 2,000 strong detachment of the 33rd Japanese Division crossed Vangte and Mualbem. On March 6, 1944 they suddenly and violently attacked the British detachment at the bridge on the Manipur River near Tonzarig, twenty miles north of Tedim. Another Japanese detachment attacked the British engineering camp near Cikha, the camp containing practically no fighting

troops but a large number of noncombatants, including five thousand Indian laborers.

Within 24 hours of the report of the attack the 17th Division was ordered to retreat from Tedim to Imphal. They had to fight their way back home however, through Tonzang and Singgial. The heaviest fighting was at Singgial, where the opposing troops fought to obtain the only existing water spring.

Some of the Zo Levies followed the retreating British army, but others returned to their homes, to rise against the Japanese some months later. Field Marshal Sir William Slim<sup>79</sup> described the retreat of the 17th Division; "It was a long column that began to wind through the hills on the afternoon of the 14th. The whole division went on foot, although it took with it great numbers of vehicles and animals, transport was reserved for stores, ammunition, supplies, and wounded. The first day it covered twenty miles while the Japanese cautiously followed; with sound tactical sense they were concentrating on cutting in ahead and blocking the road. This, by the 14th they had done in two places, just north of Tonzang and at an unhappy Milestone 109 Camp, where the tiny garrison, hampered by a mass of noncombatants, was quickly in difficulties. The Gurkhas of the 17th Division, on the 16th, dealt swiftly and effectively with the first block, sweeping the enemy from their position with bayonet and kukri. The road was now opened but only to Milestone 109."

"Nor was the Tedim road the only sector from which danger threatened. On the night of March 15-16, the Japanese 15th and 31st Divisions, poised along the east bank of the Chindwin, moved in earnest. The 15th Division crossed the river in three columns about Thaugdut with orders 'to advance through the hills like a ball of fire', to isolate Imphal from the north, and then capture the town. Moving swiftly, by March 18 one column was pressing our 20th Division's flank, near Myothit, and others, already only .50 miles from Imphal, were approaching Ukhurul. At the same time the 31st Japanese Division, in eight columns, crossed the Chindwin on a forty mile front from Homalin to the North, and pushed west like the probing fingers of an extended hand."

The Japanese cut off the 17th Division and thus pushed forward to Imphal. The British then sent two Divisions from Imphal to open a route for the 17th Division, but the British could not hold

Ukhrul, and it fell to the Japanese on the 25th of March. The 23rd Indian Division fought its way toward Tedim and opened the road to Tedim. Slim wrote, "The leading units of Robert's 37 Brigade (of the 23rd Division) with a few light tanks moving rapidly, drove off a Japanese force which was besieging a small detachment of ours at milestone 100 on the Tedim road. Before our troops could push on to the relief of the camp at Milestone 109 the enemy, infiltrating through the jungle, had established a series of road blocks behind them. They were thus forced to turn and clear the road toward Imphal while the second brigade of the 23rd Division fought south toward them. The situation on Tedim road was now for a time as it had been once been in the Arakan coast - a Neapolitan ice of layers of our troops alternating with Japanese—but in both training and morale our men were much better fitted to deal with such a confused and harassing business than they had been in 1943."

"With relief thus delayed, the situation at Milestone 109 grew critical. On the night of March 16-17, the noncombatants were skillfully led through the enemy by jungle paths to join the 23rd Division; the handful of fighting troops hung on for two days more and then followed them. The Japanese, swarming in to seize abandoned supplies and vehicles, at once set to work to build powerful defences to deny passage to the 17th Division."

"Cowan, advancing north with his main force on the road, wisely sent infantry high on the ridges to each side. While these columns cleared the crests, the 48th Brigade, with R.A.F. fighter bomber support, broke through a desperately defended position astride the road and, after another hard fight on March 25, re-took the camp itself, recovering intact most of the lost stores and vehicles. As the head of the 17th Division thus effectively dealt with the Japanese 215 Regiment, the rear guard was nightly beating off fierce attacks from a reinforced 214 Regiment. A final all out assault on March 24, when several enemy tanks were knocked out, was repulsed. Two days later the rear guard, blowing up the bridge across the Manipur River, withdrew, and the whole division moved on again. The back of the Japanese obstruction had been broken and, after some minor engagements, the 17th and the 23rd Division met at Milestone 102. Leaving two brigades of the 23rd Division to cover this approach, the 17th Division reached Imphal complete on April 5."

"Even with the Japanese driven from its banks, the crossing of the Manipur was no easy operation. The river, one hundred yards wide, was in full spate, flooding through its gorge at a speed of ten to twelve knots, hurling itself against boulders in fountains of spray, and bringing down tree trunks in full career. Its roar, audible for miles, was like that of a great football crowd. Not without difficulty the engineers got a rope across, and a flying bridge—a ferry attached to a cable—was built. The first boat to attempt the crossing was capsized by the fury of the stream. All its occupants were lost. But the cable held and next day the ferry was working, though a crossing was still a hazardous and nerve-testing experience. Ferrying in these conditions was a slow business, but by the nineteenth a road block had been placed behind the Japanese rear guard whose shelling, particularly that of some 155 mm. guns, has been thoroughly unpleasant. Next day the rear guard was attacked. An attempt by the enemy to break through the road block failed, and they took to the jungle, abandoning ninety dead and the objectionable 155-mm. guns." Thus the 17th Division reached Imphal while the Japanese continued their drive toward Imphal and Kohima.

The Japanese 15th Army under Lt. General Renya Mutaguchi launched the Japanese "march on Delhi." In this movement the entire 31st Division, 20,000 men under Major General Kotuku Sato, marched across the rugged Zo-Naga Hills to attack Kohima on April<sup>1</sup>, 1944. Kohima was defended by one thousand men including convalescents, rear-echelon troops, state police forces and the Zo and Naga soldiers of the 1st Assam Regiment. After a week of severe fighting, with assistance from the 2nd Indian Division, Kohima was held, and the Japanese advance to the railway junction at Dimapur was stopped.

General Tsumoru Yamamoto attacked Imphal from all sides over a period of four months but could not break through. The Japanese Commanding General Mutaguchi ordered his men to "continue in the task till all of your ammunition is expended. If your hands are broken, fight with your feet. If your hands and feet are broken, use your teeth. If there is no more breath left in your body, fight with your spirit. Lack of weapon is no excuse for defeat."

But the Japanese lacked not only arms. They were also madly driven by hunger and thirst. General Sato, the commander of the

31st Division lost 3,000 men and had 4,000 wounded, and he refused to continue fighting and retreated from Kohima. On June 22nd the British forces at Kohima and Imphal linked together again, winning the Kohima-Imphal battle. The battle lasted seventy four days, with over 53,000 Japanese casualties and 17,000 men lost by the 14th British Army.

Kogun Hayasgi<sup>37</sup> analyzed the Japanese defeat, "The failure of the Imphal Operation was not due to unsatisfactory action on the part of the front-line soldiers but was attributable to the fact that the Fifteenth Army made light of the enemy and ignored logistics in its complacent operational planning. The essentials of the army's logistical thinking embodied the following features.

Officers and men should carry maximum amounts of provisions. Elephants and oxen should be hauling stores.

The oxen should be devoured when provisions run out/Personnel should be prepared to eat grass. (As a matter of fact, they had already trained themselves to do so.)

The Advance along the road to Imphal from Kohima should be effected within two weeks, at the latest, after commencement of operations.

The road should be repaired after its capture, in order to convey supplies at once by motor vehicle."

### **Japanese Retreat**

By the third week of July 1944 the Japanese were driven out of the Imphal plain and were retreating toward the Chindwin and eastern Zoram (Tedim). A "Lushai Brigade" was created to pursue the Japanese along the Imphal-Tedim road. Commanded by Brigadier Marindin its objective was a long range harassing role. It was formed in a hurry from war-raised Indian Battalions and local Zo levies that had retreated to Manipur and the Chin Hills.

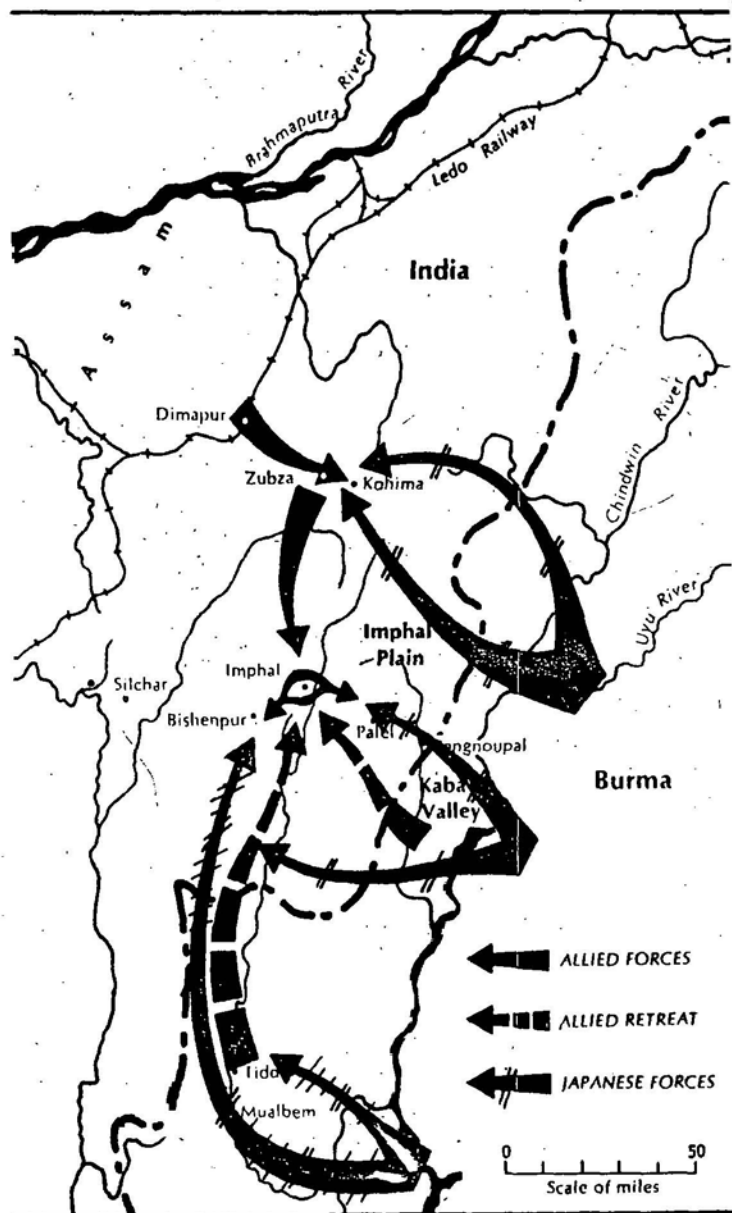
The Brigade had little equipment, no artillery or engineers and only improvised signals. There was a story that it had only one map. General Slim ordered the Brigade to pursue the Japanese down the Tedim road, and he gave it a task to "completely dislocate the Japanese traffic on the road Tedim-Imphal northbound and render it useless to the enemy as a line of communication"

Slim<sup>79</sup> wrote, ".. after difficult marches of from eight to one hundred and twenty miles across flooded streams and mountains, his two northerly battalions were, by the end of July, harrying the road by stealthy ambushes and sudden bursts of fire. More than two hundred enemy were killed, many wounded, and numerous vehicles destroyed, while several hundred Japanese -were tied down to piquet the road. All at small cost to us. The third battalion, however, made the biggest bag. It concentrated on an eight mile stretch where the road, on the east bank of Manipur, ran through a precipitous gorge. Our men on the west bank, protected by the raging torrent, kept the road under constant fire at close range. All wheeled traffic in this sector ceased."

"With his fourth battalion—my old friends the Bihar Regiment, who were so proud of their women—Marindin improved on my orders, and launched them into the Chin Hills to capture the local capitals of Falam and Haka. The Chin Levies had with them their families, and, looking like the children of Israel trekking out of Egypt, they joyfully assisted in liberating their country, dumping women and children in their own villages as they captured them."

"Helped by these actions, the main advance of the 5th Division from the north on the Tedim road continued. On September 14, the leading troops reached the west bank of the Manipur River, a hundred and twenty-six miles from Imphal. The river, now in flood, was a most formidable obstacle, but one brigade, having turned back through Imphal and Shuganu, marched down the east bank, and as our troops arrived on the west bank, seized the high ground opposite them. The Japanese, in danger of being cut off, abandoned further defence of the river line."

"Without pause, the division pushed on for Tedim with the troops already across, while tremendous efforts were made to get the remainder of the division over the river as the road behind it collapsed in mud and landslides. The leading brigade, in spite of the difficulty of the country, advanced on a wide front, so as to overlap the frequent but small Japanese rear guards. By October 1st our troops were in the hills some miles due east of Tedim, in contact with the enemy who still fought well and put in frequent counter attacks. The outflanking tactics of our troops paid off, and even the formidable 'Chocolate Staircase' position was turned



Japanese forces advanced to the Zo country and took Tedim, Falam, and Haka. Then they pushed into Meitei, and Naga country. They failed to take Imphal and Kohima, where from the British drove them quickly back to Burma, across the Zo country ending a two year Japanese occupation of the Zo country.

in this way and abandoned by the enemy after little resistance. Chocolate Staircase was the name given to the Tedim road where in seven miles it climbed three thousand feet with thirty eight hairpin bends and an average gradient of one in twelve. The road surface was earth, and marching men, animals, and vehicles soon churned it into ankle-deep mud. The hillside and with it the road itself often disappeared in thunderous landslides; then every available man had to work with pick and shovel to shape a track again. No soldier who marched up the Chocolate Staircase is ever likely to forget the name or the place. The enemy made several more desperate attempts to block the road to Tedim but the constant threat to his line of retreat, his fear of losing guns and vehicles, the accuracy of 221 Group's air strikes even in this country, and the unquenched elan of our troops in direct attack had their effect. Tedim was occupied on October 17."

"After Tedim, as the 8,800 foot Kennedy Peak was approached, the Japanese resistance hardened again. While his main force pushed steadily on, Warren staged two wide turning movements, one of which established a road block behind the enemy. In several days' fighting among mist-covered mountains the Japanese were forced to withdraw, and after frantic and costly attempts to break through on the road, they abandoned everything except their small arms and took to the jungle. On November 8 our troops reached Fort White and on the 13th, as already related, the 5th Indian and the 11th East African Divisions jointly entered Kalembo."

In the course of its advance down the Tedim road the Division had killed 1,316 Japanese—fresh corpses counted on the ground. It had wounded another 533 and had taken 53 prisoners. The British losses were 88 killed and 293 wounded.

"The Lushai Brigade, operating on the right flank of the 5th Division, had infiltrated a hundred mile front and had pushed on to the Myittha Valley. It had occupied Falam and Haka on October 19, amid great rejoicings and reunions of the loyalist tribesmen, not enlivened by the free distribution of captured rice

and stores. By mid December, when greater events were impending, the Lushai Brigade had patrols on the east bank of the Chindwin, had cleared the whole country west of the Myittha River, and was closing in on the last Japanese foothold in the Myittha Valley at Gangaw."

"There is no doubt that the enterprise and dash of this improvised and lighthearted brigade were a real contribution to the pursuit to the Chindwin. It had operated for sue months on pack transport, supplemented by an unavoidably meagre air supply, across two hundred miles of jungle mountains, against the enemy flank and rear. Considering the paucity of its equipment and resources, it gave one of the most effective and economical examples of longrange penetration."

"The Imphal-Kohima battle which now ended was the lasband greatest of the series that had been fought continuously during the past ten months on all the Burma fronts. They have achieved substantial results; the Japanese Army had suffered the greatest defeat in its history. Five Japanese Divisions (15th, 18th, 31st,33rd, and 55th) had, at any rate temporarily,pbeen destroyed as fighting formations, while two other divisions, an independent brigade, and many line-of-communication units had been badly mauled. Fifty thousand Japanese had been killed or died, and their bodies counted on the Arakan and Assam sectors."

### **Japanese Occupation**

The behaviour of the Japanese troops was described by Vumkohau. "In the early days of occupation the behavior of the Japanese troops appeared very correct. A lot of propaganda was issued by all the British civilian offices to the effect that the Japanese soldiers would molest the women folk. Not a single instance was heard of up to the occupation of Tedim."

"Soldiers hid away in the jungles during the day. Many women and children shifted their belongings from the villages to the field huts. On the way they met many Japanese soldiers. They said that women were never looked at. This kind of news spread quickly and some remarked that their behaviour appeared to be more orderly than some of those among the allied troops. Some of the criticism about the Japanese troops were that they would take baths naked outside the buildings and would also answer the

call of nature by the side of the road without taking cover."

The Japanese good behavior toward Zo women was said to have been influenced by the Burman. When they were about to enter Zo country they had asked the Burmans, "What annoyed the Zo people the most?" To this the Burmans had answered, "Do not ever touch their women! If you do so, they will turn against you." Thus there was not a single case where the Japanese molested a Zo woman.

When the Japanese first reached the Zo villages they behaved politely, and they took nothing by force. They came to sit around the fire places and share food the villagers cooked. But as they were still advancing they asked for guides, and the villagers had to supply them. They taught these guides how to survive in the jungle with little food, and their supplies were evenly distributed.

Later their attitudes changed as their supplies grew thin, and herds of cattle belonging to the villagers were slaughtered. Food grains were collected against payment with Burmese currency, which became useless after the war. Food was becoming scarce as it was not possible for the people to cultivate because of the war, and in the later part of the war the Japanese took by force any food they could find.

As soon as the Japanese occupied East Zoram they formed a local army known as the Chin Defence Army (CDA). Those who were used as guides and interpreters were made officers. Ngawcinpau and Thangzahau became lieutenants. Some Zo men were sent to Leilum for officers' training. They were Kimngin (Khuasak), Vungsuau (Tedim), Ngozam (Thuklai), Pumzakam (Khuasak), Khupsavung (Tedim), Teldolian (Tedim), Cijthang (Tedim), Luahcin (Tedim) and N. Bil (Hualngo). The CDA's main objective was to drive away the remnants of the British troops in Zoram; The CDA accordingly had some skirmishes with British troops west of the Manipur River, where Ngawcinpau, Thangzahau, Luacin, Cinthang and N. Bil were captured by the British. They were tried and found guilty of helping the Japanese and were put in various jails in India.

After some months in Zoram the Japanese showed their methods of ruling an occupied country. Contrary to their propaganda the Japanese applied very cruel methods in ruling the Zo country.

Vumkohau wrote<sup>97</sup>, "Every educated person who served with distinction with the British against the Japanese before their occupation of the Chin Hills was 'invited' from time to time to report to Tedim. Most of the invitees expressed unwillingness to serve in the new administration. When they got to Tedim, the divisional headquarters of the Japanese army for north Burma and East India, they found that things were not moving as they expected. Some of the Chiefs who took active command of their clan Levies found themselves in chains; many persons were slapped as they reported. Other Chiefs were required to reside near the Japanese camps; guns were requisitioned lest they were used for revolt. Some suspected as spies for the British were, slapped, boxed, and beaten to death in drawing rooms within sight of their families. All were required to bow low in front of the Japanese officers. One had to announce one's name every time one reported to the Japanese commissioner. Many a fat and haughty person during the British days became slim and cautious overnight. As soon as the Japanese reached the heart of the Chin Hills, they started killing people on the slightest suspicion. I believe this was to frighten the people and to show who the real masters were for the fact that they would not win the love or respect of the place they occupied in the ordinary way. When a village was suspected of being pro-British, they would send for the headman with one or two elders. If there was firing of the Taungya, they would accuse the headman of siding with the British enemy and kill him on the spot, sending out some circulars the next day that the headman of such and such town had been killed for having cooperated with the British. Fear was in everybody's mind. Nobody would dare speak evil against the occupying forces who were called 'To Thak', new masters." With the new master there appeared terms such as 'cut throat' in everyday language.

In order to look after the interests of the undefended local Zo population an organization called the "Chin Leaders Freedom League" was secretly formed. The founding members were Vumkohau, Pauzakam, Khaimunmang, Vulzathang, Ginzatuang, Lunpum, Summang, Awnngin, Zuktsio and Pi Donkoting. But the Japanese had something else in mind. They drafted the members of the Chin Leaders Freedom League to serve as civilian officers in the Japanese military administration at the Japanese Military Academy at Tedim. Earlier appointees Tualkam

and Zabiak were then promoted to captains in the Japanese Army, and they acted as administrative officers. Vumkohau became the educational officer and headquarter assistant to Inada, the Japanese cooperation commissioner. Songpau and Ginzatuang were made chui (assistants). The Japanese then moved their administrative center from Tedim to Tuikhiang, and the CDA officers served as guides. Suanghau, Ngolian, Lianhawng, Mangkonang, Ginzatuang and Vulzathang were transferred to Tuikhiang. Vumkohau and Pauzakam were left as administrators at the General Headquarter at Tedim.

At the end of 1943 the Japanese ordered that British troop formations must be reported to Japanese officers, and persons hiding such knowledge were threatened with decapitation. There were false reports by some young irresponsible people that resulted in the torture and decapitation of others. Among them was Hauzahen, who was the high priest in the Sizang-Tedim area. Other sufferings of the people were the shortage of food and the requisition of forced labor. The people were robbed of their food grains, and their cattle were slaughtered. Protesting these activities to the Japanese resulted in death sentences being passed and carried out. Labourers to carry Japanese war materials and to build roads and camps were in constant demand and were forced from the villages. Villages where there were Japanese were also bombed by the R.A.F. Unhappy with the harsh Japanese treatment the people formed the Sakte Independence Army (SIA) at Mualbem. Chief Hauzalian (Suangzang), Thawngcinthang (Saizang) and the headmen of Gungal villages were the founders of this SIA. The SIA was joined by Singlian and Suanglian of Sizang and became the Sakte and Sizang Independence Army (S.I.A.)

The resistance movement quickly spread to Ngawn, Falam, Zahau and Haka areas, and in September 1944 open rebellion against the Japanese was launched. After being suppressed for so long the Zo people were exploding for freedom, and an organization called "Free Chin" was born. The Free Chins attacked the Japanese at Mualbem, Sualim, Suangaktuam and Sakhiang, and Phutthang and his men drove the Japanese from Suangpi and Phunom areas. The Ngawn also cleared the Vazang area of Japanese. The success of the Free Chin, or as it was then known the Chin Independence Army (CIA), was enormous. But this could only happen because the Japanese strength had been

concentrated for the drive to India. Had the Japanese had a stronger force there would have been catastrophic results for the Zo people. The success was also due to the fact that the Japanese were deprived of their main source of supply, transportation and labour.

Major C.L. Burne paid his tribute to the CIA in a letter to Vumkohau, "I cannot speak too highly of the fighting spirit shown by these men, who stood up, in many cases, to daily shelling by artillery and determined counter attacks by the enemy armed with modern weapons. And not only the men. On occasions of alarm, women also armed themselves with axes and dahs, and, in addition, brought food to their menfolk while under fire."

"In these reports it would be invidious to mention names of the rank and file, among whom there were many cases of individual heroism and example. One hundred percent cooperation was given by all and every villager, if not actually fighting, did magnificent, if less spectacular work by carrying loads and supplying food gratis from their depleted stocks. It must be remembered that the Free Chins were not rationed nor were they paid."

In the southern Zo country, in the valley of Kaladan, the Japanese were very friendly at the beginning of their occupation. They had been sending Indian and Burmese agents to India from Arakan, but the intelligence they received was unsatisfactory. The Japanese Commander in Arakan, Lieutenant General Tanaya, was not content with the intelligence network which simply ran agents into India. Therefore he gave orders to recruit Zo agents along with Arakanese, Indian and Burman. The Japanese intelligence network under Captain Tanaka Seirokuro was very successful when Zo agents were employed.

At first the Masho and Khami agents collected news on the movements of the West African Division as it moved south down the Kaladan Valley. As Zo settlements stretched without political demarcations from the Valley of Kaladan to Bandurban and Chiringa, Masho and Khami agents could easily infiltrate into Chittagong and head west in Bengal. Zo agents were very happy with the small payments they received from the Japanese, so much so that they even offered Tanaka the highest priced local bride. The bride price was set at 200 yen.

The Japanese defeat at the beginning of 1945 changed conditions

however. The Japanese intelligence network depended on getting their food supply from the local people, and in many instances the Japanese used unfriendly methods to obtain food." Thus Zo people attacked the base of the intelligence unit, slaughtering the Japanese almost to a man.