



Lessons of Burma Campaign 1942-1945: A Case Study of General Bill Slim's Leadership and Military Qualities

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Abstract. This paper examines the background, strategies, tactics and battlefield experiences and qualities of General Bill Slim, one of the greatest British Generals of World War II. As a Commander of the battle fields from 1914-1958, Bill Slim's most impressive triumphs came to limelight in India and Burma in the long war against the Japanese. This paper highlights the military qualities of General Bill Slim, he employed in his military strategies the principles of flexibility and surprise. that foreshadowed modern British Military doctrine. Thrust into a desperate situation, he orchestrated the longest retreat in British Army History in the withdrawal from Burma. The turning of the tide occurred when he turned on the Japanese when they invaded India, shattered their army and pursued them to destruction in Burma. This paper points out General Slim's great military victories, he left a legacy of training and morale building that endures in the British Army to this day. This paper draws out lessons to be learnt from General Bill Slim's Military Leadership Experiences by examining some of Slim's greatest battlefield experiences and the strategies and tactics employed, Administration, Command and Control that set him apart from his counterparts. This paper has sourced both primary and secondary sources, archival materials and documents, books and journals.

Keywords: Leadership and Military Qualities of Commanders, Battlefield, Strategies, Tactics, Administration, Command and Control, Morale.

1. Introduction

Wars have been fought for centuries but each time they have been fought differently, and have left us with things to remember. They left us with some ideas or lessons that have been applied in subsequent wars. The fundamental principles may remain unchanged, but as

each war is fought and we look on it the pattern looks different. The system of control, the admin of forces involved, the strategy employed, the character of the forces involved, the command set up, and concept have always gone through some revolutionary changes after each war.

Burma, was known for its thick jungle (Burma Jungle), unfavourable terrain and climate. Burma had recorded fierce battles and campaigns of all times. The Japanese invasion of Burma in 1942 was motivated by expansionist tendencies, her quest for raw materials, her fear of China and the Soviet Union as the dominant power in Asia. The attitude of Britain and USA towards her. The Japanese attack on South-East Asia had begun the previous December simultaneously with the period of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December, 1941. Lyman states that By February the Japanese had captured Rangoon, sweeping the weak and unprepared British forces before them. General Sir Harold Alexander commanded the Burma Army having arrived as Rangoon fell, and weeks later he was provided with a Corps Commander-Slim (rapidly promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General) to command the two weak Divisions that remained. The 17th Indian Division had lost much of its strength at the Sittang River, while 1st Burma Division was made up mainly of paramilitary troops not tr (Burma Jungained or equipped to take on a first-class enemy. The one real blessing he possessed was 7th Amour Brigade. Also newly arrived with their stuart light tanks and better experience from North Africa.

Slim was determined to fight, but it very quickly became clear that the Japanese held virtually every advantage. They moved fast, were well led and had command of the sky. The country was in turmoil, with refugees blocking roads and the Japanese could

outflank defensive positions prepared by the British almost at will. It became clear that a fighting retreat back to Indian Manipur was the only thing that could save the remaining troops and prevent another humiliation like Singapore. Slim planned and commanded the withdrawal with calm brilliance.

1.1 Geography of Burma

When considering the Geography of any country in the context of Military History the essential thing to consider are Physical Features, Climate, Drainages, Vegetation and their effects on Military Operations. The Geography of Burma played a significant role in the Burma Campaign. It is therefore important to be familiar with the location, terrain, drainage, climate and vegetation of Burma for a better understanding of the various operations. Burma is a small country in South East Asia. It is bordered by China in the North East, French Indo-China and Siam in the East, India in the West and North West and the Bay of Bengal in the South.

It stretches 1,300 miles North to South and about 575 miles East to West. The total mass is approximately 260,000 square miles. Burma terrain is composed of three main geomorphological structures; the Arakan Yoma, Shan Plateau and the Central Basin. These are further sub-divided into the following 7 natural regions. The location had a lot of effects on movement of vehicles and personnel tactics as well as battle formation. The general effects on operations is no limited to restriction on operation to specific periods of the year. Their movement tactics was affected, they also have visibility obstacles from air and ground. It also helped to increase supply in the forest during raining season. Burma officially called Union of Burma is the largest country by area located to the South east Asia. Burma is also known as Myanmar. Burma has long coastline that borders the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

1.2 The Military Significance of Burma

Until 1937 Burma was part of the Indian Empire. It formed the largest province. In 1937, it became a separate country of the British Commonwealth. Burma forms barrier between the India sub-continent and the rest of Asia and constitutes a natural strategic shield of the Japanese conquest in South West Pacific. Japanese believed that once Burma was conquered, threat to her conquest would be minimal. The Japanese also believed that Burma was the corridor to the Indian sub-continent

It is important to note that: The Japanese invasion of Burma was motivated should exhibit by

- Expansionist tendencies
- Her quest for raw materials
- Her fear of China and the Soviet Union as the dominant power in Asia.
- The attitude of Britain and USA towards the Japanese.

The geography of Burma is of fundamental military significance. The effects of the surface of the land, the vegetation, the climate and drainages on military operations cannot be over emphasized.

2. Conceptual Clarification.

2.1 Leadership

The essence of leadership encompasses everything that a leader is, knows and does that affects mission accomplishments. Leadership is a process by which a soldier applies his beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge and skills to influence others to accomplish the mission. In essence, leadership is tough and complex. Good leadership focuses on the creation of cohesive, disciplined units that can withstand the stress of battle and win.

The follower is the common denominator for leadership. One cannot be a good leader unless he has a basic understanding of human nature and a clear understanding of the particular attributes of his subordinates. The leader must understand the follower's values, character traits, knowledge, skill, needs, fears, experience, education and goals if he is to communicate with them and influence them to accomplish missions. Commanders at all levels must be placed in circumstances where they must make decisions and live with the consequences.

2.1.1 Leadership and Military Qualities of A Commander

- A Commander should have the moral and physical courage to carry out greater responsibilities
- Calmness and decisions in a crisis
- The necessary balance of professionalism, intelligence and practicality to carry the added breath and weight of the responsibility that goes with promotion.
- The ability to innovate successfully and confidently rather than implement another plan.

2.2 Morale

Morale according to Smith is “the spirit that seeks to triumph in adversity and arms a man against the shock of battle. It is a measure of the cohesion and power of that individual or group’s resolve to pursue its object come what may”.

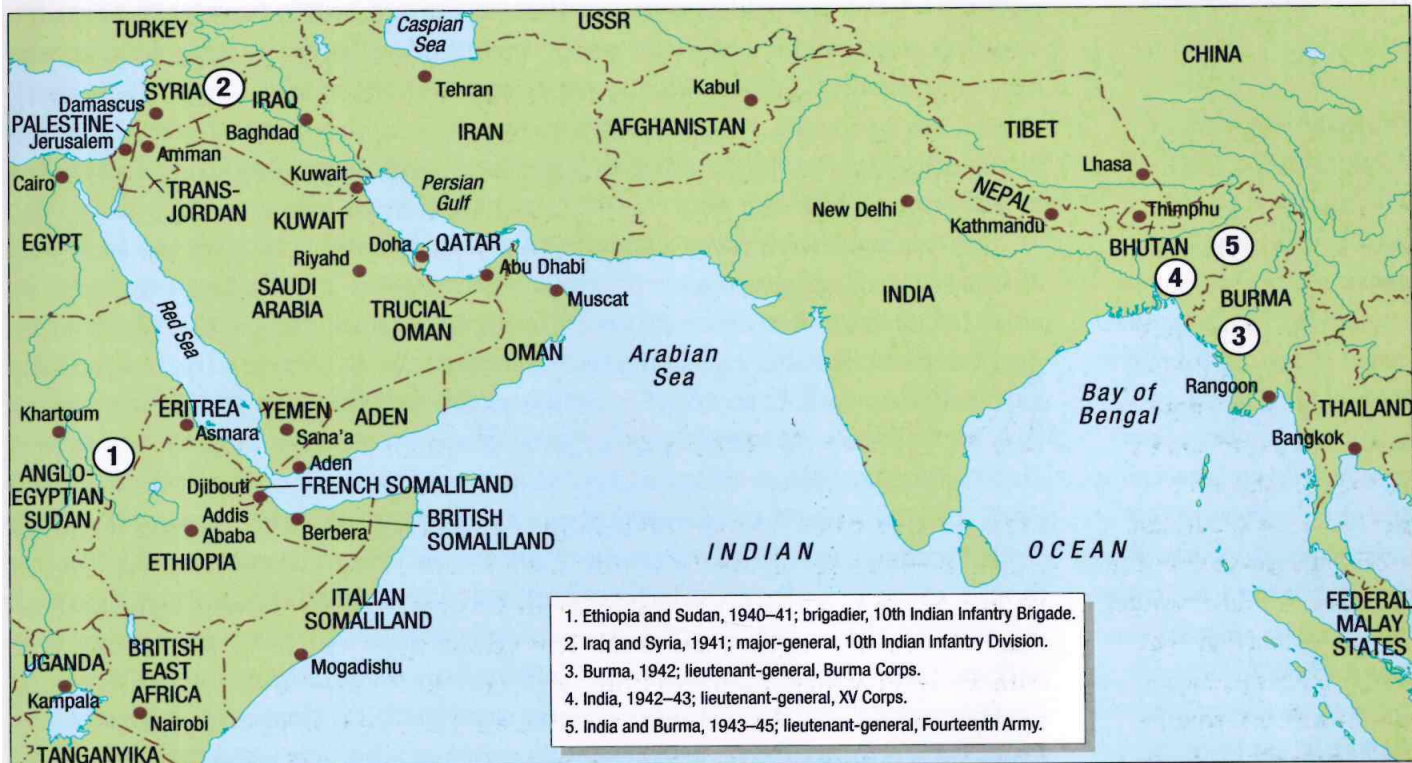
Between 1943 and 1944 General Bill Slim transformed the utterly defeated British Eastern Army into the ever-victorious Fourteenth Army. Here Morale describes how he helped the men to believe in themselves. Morale is a state of mind. It is that intangible force which will move a whole group of men to give their last ounce to achieve something, without counting the cost to themselves.

2.2.1 The Essentials of Morale

The essence of morale is that it should endure - have certain foundation. These foundations are Spiritual,

Intellectual and Material, and that is the order of their importance. Spiritual first, because only spiritual foundations can stand real strain. Next, intellectual, because men are swayed by reason as well as feeling. Material last-important, but last-because the very highest kinds of morale are more often met when material condition are lowest. High morale is the quality which maintains human dignity in battle and at the same time develops man’s heroism. High morale is crucial to the success of any undertaking whether it be an attempt by an individual a military organization or a nation. Morale, is the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand a sense of common purpose with respect to a group; esprit de corps. The quintessence of morale in war was captured eloquently by Patton who wrote that "wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory.

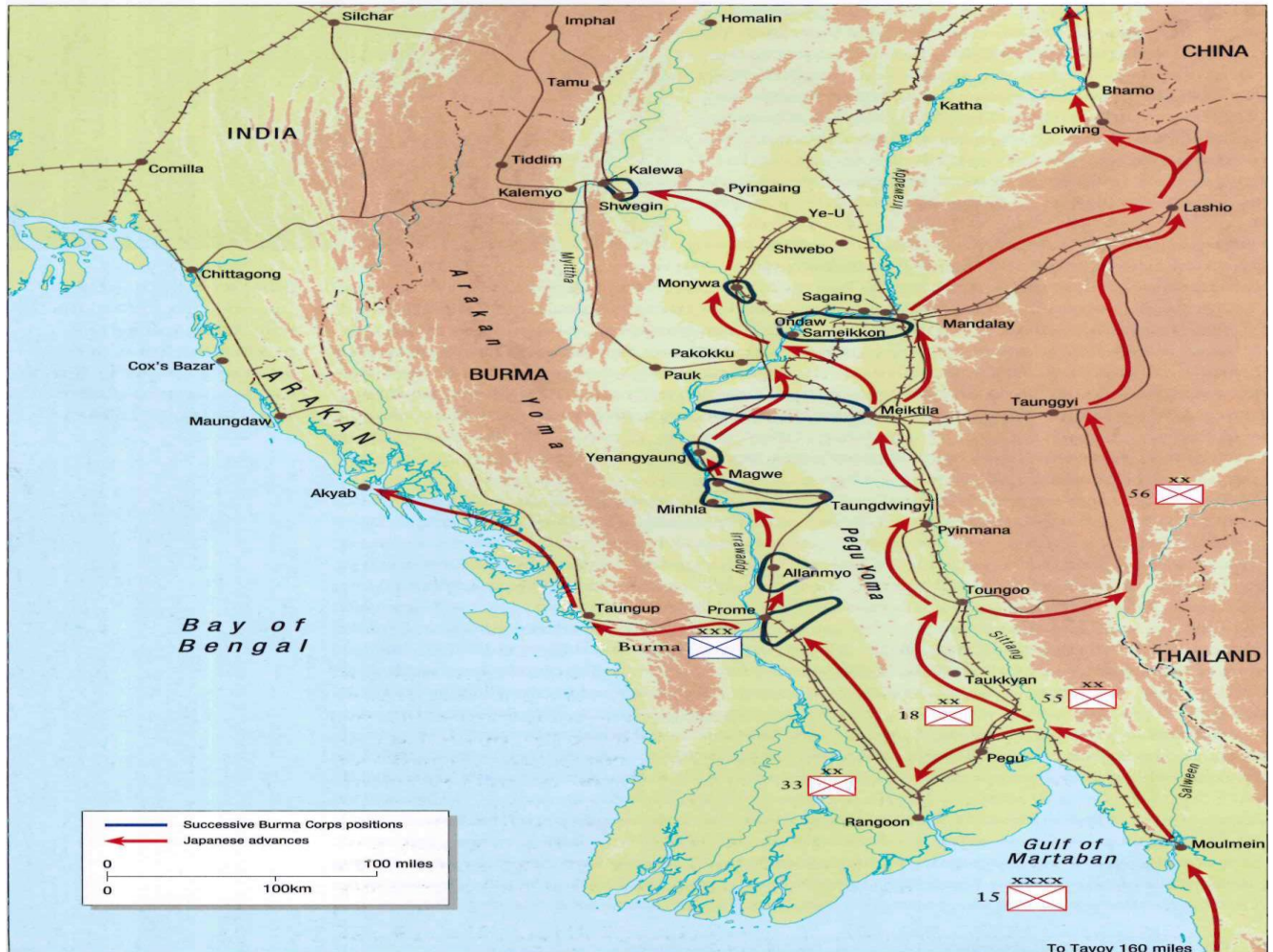
The extent of operations in which Slim was involved, 1940–45



Source: Robert Lyman, *BILL SLIM, Leadership, Strategy Conflict*, Great Britain, Osprey Publishing, 2011. P. 13.

Source: Robert Lyman, *BILL SLIM, Leadership, Strategy Conflict*, Great Britain, Osprey Publishing, 2011. p.20.

The retreat from Burma



2.3 The Retreat From Burma

The British troops in Burma could not stop the Japanese advance due to tactical and administrative problems.

The situation in Europe and North Africa made it impossible for British to give enough attention to Burma. Though they were aware of the threat to Burma following the fall of Malaya, troops and materials were not readily available to checkmate Japanese advance. The advance was so rapid that the Allied troops embarked on retreat from Burma

2.4 The First Arakan Campaign, 1942-1943

The First Arakan Campaign failed for the following reasons:

- Lack of adequate preparation
- Failure to grasp the Japanese infiltration tactics.
- The effect of the terrain and climate of Burma on Military Operations.
- The use of large number of troops instead of small scale patrol.
- 15th Division fighting in the Mayu Range, Arakan, February 1944

After the disastrous first campaign in Arakan in late 1942 and early 1943, Slim began retraining his army. The essential requirement in combat and support units alike, was for well trained, motivated troops exceptionally confident in their fighting skills, their tactics and their leaders. Such could be achieved in only as a result of hard and realistic training. Even administrative and support units had to be able to stand fast in the event of encirclement and defend their perimeter against attack. Under rigorous new leadership new life began to cascade through the veins of what was shortly to become Fourteenth Army. Every man was rigorously trained as fighter. Live training with artillery, mortars, and medium guns was carried out. All ranks practiced fighting with tanks, artillery, mortars and aircraft as well as bayonet and grenade. The fighting in Arakan from February 1944 countered Japanese superiority on the battlefield with their confidence restored the Japanese offensive in Arakan was decisively repelled.⁹

The Second Arakan campaign



Source: Robert Lyman, *BILL SLIM, Leadership, Strategy Conflict*, Great Britain, Osprey Publishing, 2011. p.28

2.5 Wingate First Mission (First Chindit) and Second Arakan Campaign

2.5.1 The Chindits

Lyman was of the assertion that, “while Mutaguchi and Slim struggled for dominance in the bloody battles of Imphal and Kohima, Major General Orde Wingate launched his second Chindit offensive into the heart of Burma”. In August 1943 Churchill and Roosevelt had given Wingate a force of 23 Infantry Battalion and a vast American-supplied air armada (a military fleet or armed ship that fight wars at sea) to mount an operation into Burma in 1944. The propaganda following his first expedition in 1943, Operation Longcloth, together with Churchill’s flattery and support had led Wingate to believe he had come up with a winning strategy to defeat the Japanese

His idea was to fly a powerful army into the heart of Japanese held Burma, there to destroy the Japanese from within. The concept centered upon the creation by the Chindit force of strongholds capable of self defence, in areas inaccessible to Japanese armour and artillery to provide bases for guerilla raids against the Japanese lines of communication supporting their offensive against Stilwell’s Chinese in the far north of Burma. By September, 1944, Stilwell had two Chinese Divisions. According to Lyman, “they would be properly garrisoned and would contain an airstrip so that supply could be flown in and casualties flown out as well as ground and anti-aircraft artillery, the lack of which had proved to be a severe deficiency during Operation Longcloth, Wingate considered that the greatest benefit of this plan was that it would avoid the perils of a ground offensive across the Chindwin. Although, a remarkable and inspiring battlefield Commander, he was not a strategist, and Slim was convinced that Wingate’s conception was dangerously flawed.”¹²

2.5.2 Imphal to Kohima and the Libration of Arakan

The Japanese at no time abandoned their plans to invade India. Right from the time they invaded Burma, plans were made for the invasion of India. “The March to Delhi” was to be a “U” Operation against the Allied Manipur front:

Seize the main Allied Advance base at Imphal

Deprive Stiwell’s American-Chinese troops of supplies by cutting the Bengal –Assam railway line. The plan in 1943 was to strengthen the Chinese who were also fighting the Japanese.at North Burma Operations.

Overrun Assam and deprive Chinese mainland of supplies.

2.6 The Allied Courses of Action

The Allies had three possible courses:

Anticipated the Japanese advance, cross the Chindwin and fight them in Burma
Resist the Japanese river crossing by occupying the line of the Chindwin in strength
Fight the Japanese on the Imphal plain.

General Slim, the Allied Commander chose to fight the Japanese on the Imphal plain.

2.6.1 The Allied Forces

The Allied IV Corps had three Divisions:

- The 17th Indian Div to the South watching Tiggim and Kalemio
- The 20th Indian Div to the East protecting the frontier approaches to the Chindwin
- The 23rd Indian Div North East of Imphal.

2.6.2 The Japanese Forces

The Japanese Fifteenth Army has three Divisions in the area:

- The 23rd and 15th Divs in Imphal area
- The 31st in Kohima area
- The South East Asian Command became operational in October 1943.

Lord L Mountbatten became the Supreme Allied Commander with his Headquarter in India and later in Ceylon.

Lord L. Mountbatten's Directive:

- Clear the Japanese out of North and Central Arakan
- Establish a bridge-head at Taungup

Open the Taungup-Prome Road (before the Monsoon if possible) Develop Air Base at Akyah and Kyaukpyu

Lord Mountbatten's directives shows that the liberation of Arakan was key to the entire operations in Burma.

Allied Reaction - The Allies did not fall back. Supplies were airdropped and 26Div was rushed in. At this time the Japanese found themselves trapped. Meanwhile, Admin Area and Corps Headquarters held firm. The Japanese were deprived of air support and short supplies tried to pull out in February 1944, but it was too late. This was the first time major Allied victory against the Japanese in Burma was recorded. The Allied morale began to soar.

To the east were the 81st West African Division. The Division advanced into Kaladan valley where they built a 75 mile track called the "African Way". They also fought in Tamadu, Dalet and Arakan. Airstrips were also built. The 81 and 82 West African Div which was also comprised of the Nigeria Regiment of the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) continued to drive the Japanese before them and after heavy fight at, Myohaung, Lemro River was crossed and Minbya was captured and occupied. The Nigeria Regiment of the RWAFF as West African Forces of the 82 Div fought valiantly well on the side of the British and the Allied Forces during the Burma Campaign defeating the Japanese and won Distinguished Medals medals for their gallantry role:

Tamadu was taken by the 82 West African Div comprising the Nigeria Regiment of the West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) assisted by 25 Div crossed to contain the Japanese and rounded them up by 13 May, 1944. The Japanese could not escape. The Taungun was occupied thus completing the Liberation of Arakan. The Japanese resistance after the liberation of Arakan gradually diminished.

3. Chindwin to Irrawaddy and the Last Phase

Slim's plan was to effect a rapid crossing by IV corps, dash eastwards cut Kimura's line of communication to Rangoon and encircle the Japanese 15th and 33rd Armies. The Allied IV and XXXIII Corps had to regroup, Slim's plan to divide the Japanese attention, draw their forces to the North and effect the Southern crossing is a masterpiece of strategic planning. The decision to cut the Japanese line of communication with Rangoon brought about absolute victory over the Japanese who became confused. It left Kimura the Japanese's Commander with the choice of either to withdraw or wait for annihilation. Slim's decision to press on despite the approaching Monsoon and shortage of administrative resources kept Kimura off balance. The decision was key to the final phase of the Burma Campaign.¹⁶

Slim's reconquest of Burma



Source: Robert Lyman, *BILL SLIM, Leadership, Strategy Conflict*, Great Britain, Osprey Publishing, 2011, p. 41.

4. Morale and Leadership in War: A Case Study of General Bill Slim (Later Field Marshal)

General Bill Slim (later Field Marshal), the man responsible for destroying two Japanese armies during World War II, the first in India, around Imphal and Kohima in 1944 and the second in Burma around Meiktila and Mandalay, in 1945. Every analysis of Slim's achievements in Burma provides evidence of remarkable military talent. Most are effusive in their praise for him as a military commander. In a masterful

summary of the higher command of the Burma Campaign, the historian, Frank McLynn states:

There are solid grounds for asserting that when due allowances have been made... Slim's encirclement of the Japanese on the Irrawaddy deserves to rank with the great military achievements of all times- Alexander at Gaugamela in 331 BC, Hannibal at Cannae (216BC), Julius Caesar at Alesia (58 BC), the Mongol General at Subudei at Mohl (1241) or Napoleon at Austerlitz (1805). The often made –but actually ludicrous – comparison between Montgomery

and Slim is relevant here... there is no Montgomery equivalent of the Irrawaddy Campaign. His one attempt to prove himself a master of the war of movement- OPERATION MARKET GARDEN against Amhem- was a signal and embarrassing failure. Montgomery was a military talent; Slim was a military genius. Yet, in 1942 Bill Slim presided over the British Army's longest ever retreat, 1000 miles (1,600 km) from Burma into India. How did he find himself in command of a triumphant, all conquering army in India in 1944 and Burma in 1945? The story of the transformation of this army from defeat into victory- The title of his best- selling War Memoir in 1956 is not just the story of British arms in the Far East between 1942 and 1945, but the account of Slim's rise to military greatness. At the end of the war he commanded the largest British Military Force ever assembled and at Imphal in 1944 (to say nothing of Mandalay-Meiktila in 1945) had dealt what one Japanese commentator, a veteran diplomat, considered to be the greatest defeat Japan had ever suffered in its history.

Slim was successful as a commander for two reasons. He was first and foremost, a born leader of men. He was constantly mindful of the predicament of the men who had to fight battles designed by men who would often be far to the rear when the bullets began to fly. Slim instinctively knew that the strength of an army lies not in its equipment or its officers, but in the training and morale of its soldiers.

His basic premise was:

That the fighting capacity of every unit is based upon the faith of soldiers in their leaders., that discipline begins with the officer and spread downward from him to the soldier; that genuine comradeship in arms is achieved when all ranks do more than is required of them... in battle, the soldier has only his sense of duty, and his sense of shame. These are the things which make men go on fighting even though terror grips their heart. Every soldier, therefore, must be instilled with pride in his unit and in himself, and to do this he must be treated with justice and respect.

Slim knew his men and could communicate with them man to man, because he was one of them and from the bloody days of in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia during World War I and in the inter-war years on North-West Frontier, had experienced their bitterest trials Slim understood his men, he spoke their language and moved among them from forward positions to training bases. Wherever he moved he lifted morale.²⁰ In addition to giving them the mental and practical wherewithal he instilled confidence in his men to fight the Japanese, one of the most fearsome armies the

British have ever had to face. Slim, took many practical steps to improve his men's health and welfare. His approach to the building up of the fighting power of an army- from a situation of profound defeat and in the face of crippling resource constraints – was built on the twin platforms of rigorous training and development of each individual's will to win, through a deeply thought-out programme of support designed to meet the physical, intellectual and spiritual needs of each fighting man.

As a result, the men of Fourteenth Army- British, India, African and Gurkha- gave him their loyalty in a way rarely seen in the annals of command. Slim's second legacy was his approach to warfare. His entire approach to strategy was to exploit his enemy's weakness and so undermine his will to win. He did this successfully in Syria, India, and Burma by concentrating force to achieve surprise, psychological shock and physical momentum. By so doing he attempted to achieve moral dominance on the battle field over his enemies...

According to Lyman

Slim sought opportunities at every turn to trick and deceive his enemy. In the fighting in Burma, this required realistic physically demanding training: the use of air power to supply forward troops, new tactics to fight the Japanese, the delegation of command to the lowest possible level, a self-help approach to logistical deficiencies and a relentless exploitation of the pursuit, to ensure that an enemy caught off guard had limited opportunities to recover its equilibrium. The campaigns in India and Burma in 1944 and 1945 were to reward Slim's approach to warfare with a victory that few if any in 1942 or 1943 foresaw.²¹

Slim Drafted a Summary of the Key Tactical Ideas That Had Impressed Him in Burma Some of Which Were Lessons Learnt Directly From the Japanese.

The individual soldier must learn by living, moving, and exercising in it that the jungle is neither impenetrable nor unfriendly. When he has once learnt to move and live in it, he can use it for concealment, covered movement and surprise.

Patrolling is the master key to jungle fighting. All units, not only infantry battalions, must learn to patrol in the jungle, boldly, widely, cunningly and offensively.

All units must get used to having Japanese parties in their rear, and this happens, regard not themselves, but the Japanese as surrounded

In defence, no attempt should be made to hold long continuous lines.

Avenues of approach must be covered and enemy penetration between our posts dealt

with at once by mobile local reserves who have completely reconnoitered the country.

There should rarely be frontal attacks and never frontal attacks on narrow fronts. Attacks should follow hooks and come in from flank or rear, while pressure holds the enemy in front.

Tanks can be used in almost any country except swamp. In close country they must always have infantry with them to defend and reconnoiter for them. They should always be used in the maximum numbers available and capable of being deployed. Whenever possible penny packets must be avoided. "The more you use, the fewer you lose".

There are no combatants in jungle warfare. Every unit and sub-unit, including medical ones, is responsible for its own all-round protection, including patrolling at all times.

If the Japanese are allowed to hold the initiative, they are formidable. When we have it, they are confused and easy to kill. By mobility away from roads, surprise and offensive action we must regain and keep the initiative.

These principles outlined the key requirements necessary to enable the individual soldier to master the art of fighting in the jungle against a skillful, determined and resourceful opponent by day and night. Training was central to the discipline soldiers needed to control their fear, and that of their subordinates in battle; to allow them think clearly and shoot straight in a crisis, and to inspire them to maximum physical and mental endeavor. Slim recognized that the psychological dimension of battle against the Japanese was formidable. The Japanese were not bogeymen, as many in Burma corps had realized during the retreat, but myth of their invisibility had swept the British Indian Army following the unprecedented disasters of the loss of Malaya, Singapore and Burma. The Japanese soldier was, nevertheless, well trained and hardy, prepared to accept almost hardship and sacrifice.²²

Slims aim was to train the Army ruthlessly to live by these new standards... By October 1943, he had developed a plan of action to rebuild the fighting spirit of his troops based on three (3) principles of action. These dealt with spiritual intellectual and material factors in turn.

By the 'spiritual' principle he meant that the Army must be a great and noble object, its achievement must be vital the method of achievement must be active and aggressive and each man must feel that what he is and what he does matters directly towards the attainment of the object. It was critical, he argued, that all troops, of whatever rank, background and nationality believed

in the cause they were fighting for. The cause itself had to be just. In Burma, Slim wrote, "We fought for the clean, the decent, the free things."

By the 'intellectual' principle he meant that soldiers had to be convinced that the object could be attained. The principle task was to destroy the notion that the Japanese soldier was invincible. Equally the soldier had also to know that the physical care of a soldier in the field has a direct bearing on his performance in battle: lack of food, water, medical support or contact with home tend to weaken the resolve, over time, of even the stoutest man. By the material

foundation Slim meant that each man had to feel that he would get a fair deal from his Commanders and from the Army generally, that he would as far as humanly possible be given the best weapons and equipment for his task and that his living and working conditions would be made as good as they could be.

5. The Lessons of Burma Campaign

The Burma Campaign touches on all the fundamentals. However, the obvious lessons are highlighted thus:

5.1 Control

Control may be considered in terms of higher direction and those by Commanders in the field.

Higher Direction: The early Allied failures and retreat were in the main due to lack of objective. Commanders in the field were not told the intentions of the policy makers in Britain. No clear directives were given. The political and military objectives were not clear.

Command and Control in the Field: The initial Allied Command set up was not suitable for troops of different nationalities in Burma. All Allied Forces in Burma had to come under one command.²⁴

The Allied learnt, though not without initial failures the need for a clear and definite objective for the campaign in Burma. They learnt that the successful conduct of the campaign required a reorganization of the Allied Command set up which would eliminate clashes of personality.

5.2 Administration

Administration was at the expense of mobility. The Allies were used to static wars in Europe. They were carried away by conditions in Europe and Africa, where movement of vehicles and heavy equipment did not present much problem. Unfortunately, the vegetation and climate in Europe and the open desert in North Africa are different from the jungles of Burma. While the Japanese lived off the land, the

Allies relied on supplies. The Japanese travelled light and were highly mobile but, the Allies were bogged down by unnecessary administrative requirements.

5.3 Character of Forces on Both Sides

The Allied Commander's plans were flexible but the Japanese Commanders were rather rigid in their plans. The Japanese were ruthless and bold as long as their plans worked, but were always confused when such plans ran into difficulties. Their strength lay in the spirit of the individual Japanese soldier and not in the higher leadership. The Allied troops on the other hand were not used to jungle conditions in Burma, but had to learn by experience and training that success in Burma required aggressive spirit on the part of every soldier. The Allies also underrated the ability, boldness, determination and the extent of endurance of the Japanese.

5.4 Concepts

In Burma the concept was the use of small forces unlike Europe and North Africa. The Allies learnt that these small forces were highly mobile and could operate for days or weeks with no lines of communication except by air.

The concept of envelopment which denied the enemy (the Japanese) both his line of communication and reinforcements weakened the Japanese forces and caused confusion among them. Consequently, the Allies defeated them. Air supply therefore became a determining factor in the absence of land communication.

6. Summary and Conclusion

The decision to fight the Japanese on the Imphal plain was necessary because withdrawal from Imphal and Kohima would have been disastrous to the Allies. The importance of Air support in the operations is noteworthy. The Japanese hope of capturing Allied supplies was an administrative blunder. It is, however, pertinent to mention here that many other lessons such as the use of Special Forces for long range penetration, ability to rely entirely on Air Supply and Tactical freedom for subordinate commanders, are worth considering. This paper has only touched on the few Lessons that were unique in the Burma Campaign by drawing out lessons from the Leadership and Military qualities of Field Marshal Bill Slim.

When drawing lessons from any campaign it is important to review STRATEGY, TACTICS, ADMINISTRATION AND HIGHER DIRECTION

which are the fundamentals. The strategy adopted in Burma was Deep Penetration by small size patrols supported by air and disruption of enemy lines of communication. Strategy is the form by which each belligerent fought the campaign. This embraces the plans and conduct. In TACTICS, the important aspect is the form of manoeuvre in the field. Admin of men and material should be considered. This will bring out admin problems and steps taken to overcome them.

When considering the HIGHER DIRECTION OF WAR, it is important to note the conflict of ideas between the political decision and the military decision. Hitler and very often Churchill disagreed with commanders in the field. Japanese War Lords also hardly agreed with the politicians. Lessons of the Campaign will normally bring out the achievements, successes to improve on and blunders to guide against, why mistakes were made and what should have been done to avoid such mistakes.

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