

LACK OF AIRCRAFT AND MEN AMONG REASONS FOR LOSSES

Improper Defence Plans
—Fifth Column Also
Played Part

TREMENDOUS ODDS

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Bureau, by A. C. Cummings.
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London, May 4. — Another huge slice of the British Empire, three times as large as the United Kingdom with a population of 15 millions and wealth measured by hundreds of millions of dollars, has virtually been lost in this war. Burma has followed Malaya and its loss has been due to much the same causes—lack of aircraft, lack of adequate numbers of troops, lack of proper defence plans, and finally, fifth columnists who treacherously helped invaders take their country.

Travelled Light

Burma will be retaken, but that campaign will require time. The Japanese, after seizure of the port of Rangoon, made astonishing progress through the jungle and fever-infested swamps along the banks of the great rivers and Burma's few highways.

They travelled light, living on a little rice, and brought up tanks wherever they could. They had approximately one hundred thousand men — overwhelming forces when compared with the British and with what Gen. Chiang Kai-Shek could send over the Burma road, which the enemy has now cut.

Almost everywhere the Japanese were helped by Burmese traitors, though some Burmese troops fought loyally and well by the side of famous British regiments.

Refugee panics caused grave dislocation of troop movements. Probably one million Burmese took to the roads and rivers, fleeing in terror from the enemy, whose reputation for cruelty had preceded him.

War correspondents reported that British troops, as in Malaya, were not trained in jungle warfare. They fought and died in steamy heat, sometimes unable to see the foe

who slaughtered them. Red tape, which compelled army leaders to consult the Burmese government on thousands of details, hampered operations, and the shortage of interpreters did not make co-operation with the Chinese allies any easier.

Tactically, the absence of enough aeroplanes to give the allies mastery of the air was fatal. It was not that bombers could not be sent from India, nor that reinforcements were not available. The main difficulty was lack of aerodromes.

Poisoned Wells

Absence of proper roads and railway links with India and the early loss of Rangoon added to the catastrophe which has overtaken one of the richest areas of the whole Empire. As for fifth columnists, they not only spied for the Japanese, but cut off stragglers, killed and wounded, and spread panic, and even, it is asserted, poisoned wells.

Up to a week ago official spokesmen hoped the Japanese would be checked by the monsoon. But the Japanese won the race to Mandalay against these terrific rains and now the defending armies have been driven northward so far they may be hemmed in against the hills and forests of northern Burma. Altogether, it is a grim story of retreat and loss, relieved only by the incomparable bravery of British soldiers fighting in wholly novel conditions.

What happens next? China has been cut off from her land line of communication with her allies and means must be found to open up, by road or air, new supply routes to Chungking. The Japanese doubtless will organize air raids against Calcutta as the next objective, but it is comforting to know that Bengal has been better organized for defence than either Burma or Malaya.

Three Choices

But from its present centralized position the Nipponese general staff has the choice of three new offensives once they have secured themselves from counter-attacks in Burma. First they can drive into China, though this is a hazardous campaign. Secondly, they can at-

tempt the invasion of Ceylon or India and, thirdly, they can seek the knockout of Australia before it becomes a great base for an allied counter-offensive now beginning to be organized. The Japanese still hold the initiative in the Far East on every front, best-informed circles in London say, "and it rests with them to decide where they will strike next.

"They can choose Australia, China, India and Ceylon or even Siberia. But they can only choose one of these. Whichever it is, we can say that sooner or later Nemesis will be in their track. We have our plans, too, and the time will come when we shall put them into operation."

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