



Robert Mole aged 36 years

*The Temple Bells
are Calling*

*A Personal Record of the Last Years of
British Rule in Burma*

*by
Robert Mole*



Pentland Books

Preface

AT A TIME WHEN THE Second British Empire is passing away, to be replaced by a free association of self-governing states, when all that remains of it is a handful of more backward territories and isolated bases, this personal record of the last years of Britain's rule of one of the most fascinating of her overseas dependencies may be of interest as an account of a way of life which will soon have vanished for ever.

The Burmese, one of the most attractive people in Asia, have often been called 'the Irish of the East' and, like the Irish, they elected not to remain members of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Many of them regretted this, but it was their decision, and notwithstanding their severance of the link with Great Britain they and the British have remained friends.

Most of what I have written is based on my own experiences, but for background information I have drawn on *British Rule in Burma* by my old tutor G. E. Harvey, *The British in Asia* by Guy Wint, *Burma Handbook* (published by the Government of Burma in Simla in 1943), *Burmese Economic Life* by J. Russell Andrus, and, for the period of the war with Japan, *Last and First in Burma* by Maurice Collis and *Defeat into Victory* by Field-Marshal Lord Slim.

R.F.M.
Nairobi,
Kenya.
April 1963.

CHAPTER TEN

In the Valley of Death

1943-44

I RETURNED TO Calcutta towards the end of January feeling very much better and was posted back to Ewing's office, where the work was now rather different. The emphasis was no longer on the troubles of those who had fled from Burma, but on sending supplies to the inhabitants of those parts of the country which we were still administering. Our only refugee problem was the Arakanese camp at Dinajpur in northern Bengal. North Arakan had been peopled by a mixture of Arakanese Buddhists and Muslims of Chittagonian origin. After the collapse of the administration in 1942, communal strife had broken out, with the result that the two communities had become segregated, the Chittagonians concentrating in the north and the Arakanese in the south. Between the two was a sort of no man's land. The area occupied by the Chittagonians now became so Indian that the Burmese and Arakanese languages were no longer understood; and all Buddhist pagodas and monasteries were destroyed. During the troubles large numbers of Arakanese Buddhists had fled into Bengal, and a camp had been established for them in Dinajpur. Our government had sent there as camp commandant a senior officer who was himself Arakanese, and it seemed that he did not always work in harmony with the Deputy Commissioner, who was an Indian. Moreover, the statistics of death and disease in the camp perturbed us. We had of course to deal very tactfully with the Bengal Government over these matters, and they gave us a considerable amount of anxiety.

In the matter of supplies for the people of the frontier areas we worked in very close conjunction with the Burma Government's Directorate of Supply, which was responsible for physically moving them. The main areas of Burma now administered by us were the Chin Hills, the northern part of the Kabaw Valley and the Arakan Hill Tracts, and in almost all cases new supply routes had to be opened up, for in peacetime there had been virtually no trade across these frontiers of India and Burma.

Off and on I spent the best part of a year in Calcutta, some four

months in 1942 and six in 1943. The friend whose flat I was sharing soon moved to an Army job in Delhi and I retained the flat. Calcutta seemed to grow more and more crowded. There was a large leave centre for British troops across the road from my flat, and the pavements of Chowringhee were thronged with troops, Indian, British and American.

Calcutta was a busy, but not a beautiful, city. The main streets were full of Bengalis in white shirts and *dhotis*, looking pretty prosperous. But as soon as you turned off these main streets, you were in dirty lanes of squalid shops and houses. Even the principal thoroughfares were beset by groups of beggars who stationed themselves on the pavements and exhibited their sores and deformities in the hope of exciting charitable feelings in the breasts of passers-by. Most of these were professional beggars, and it was said that the profession could be very lucrative. I have seen a small boy being instructed by an older beggar, no doubt his father, to cross his legs so as to make it appear that he was deformed. It was not until fairly late in the war that the authorities decided to clear these persons off the streets and to put them into some kind of home; they naturally met with opposition from those whose means of livelihood was thus abruptly terminated.

Another hazard of the Calcutta pavements was the bulls; one would not infrequently find one of these reclining on the wide Chowringhee pavement, sublimely unconscious of passing pedestrians. A disgusting spectacle was the refuse bins placed at many of the street corners. When these were full, scavengers would come and search through the rubbish for anything which might be of use. When they had finished, they invariably left the greater part of the contents on the pavement, and the stench of decaying vegetable matter heated by the tropical sun was frequently so foul as to force the pedestrian to cross the road in order to place as wide a berth as possible between himself and the garbage.

It was pleasant to walk in the late afternoon on the *maidan*, a long park running for about two miles between Chowringhee and the Hooghly River, and ending at the dome-capped Victoria Memorial, dazzling white in the sunshine. But war-time needs gradually encroached on the *maidan*; the Royal Air Force used its wide roads as runways, and little by little areas were fenced off and used for military purposes.

I have described how the frontier fringe of Burma, which was not occupied by the Japanese, was now being administered by civilian officials of the Burma Government; a Burma officer had been posted to Assam as Commissioner of the 'Frontier Division'. All these

CHAPTER ELEVEN

North Arakan and the Refounding of the Old Town 1944-45

*W*E TRAVELLED BY ROAD from Palasbari over the Khasi Hills, through the Assam capital of Shillong, and down again into the heat of the plains to Sylhet, where we boarded the train for Chittagong. We arrived the next day and spent the night in an Army rest camp. There was an office of the Civil Affairs supplies branch in Chittagong, which provided a truck to take us on to Bawli Bazaar, the headquarters of the Military Administration in North Arakan and some one hundred miles distant. We arrived in the late afternoon of the 30th April.

The area which was at that time under British administration was a small portion of the extreme north of the Akyab District, consisting of little more than the two narrow and parallel valleys of the Pruma and Kalapanzin Rivers. The Civil Affairs organisation in North Arakan provided both territorial and formation CAOs; there were no fewer than four divisions operating in the area, each with a CAO attached to it. Bawli Bazaar was a small village on the Pruma, which in peacetime had been of absolutely no consequence. The Senior CAO was Apedaile, and there was a territorial CAO, Peter Murray, stationed over the hills to the east at Goppe Bazaar in the Kalapanzin Valley. Peter had done his Burmese course with me at Oxford; after the outbreak of war he had joined the Burma Navy, and he continued to wear his naval badges of rank in the Civil Affairs Service, causing some confusion to military personnel. As a result of the communal disturbances which occurred in 1942 after the British evacuation from Arakan and to which I have referred before, the entire population of this area was now Muslim. They were Chittagonian by race and spoke a type of Bengali. Only a very few could speak Arakanese, a dialect form of Burmese, and we relied almost entirely on interpreters for communication with them.

Our camp at Bawli was on the river bank and consisted of a

Bengal. I suggested keeping them and training them as mess servants and, since we were the only people in the area who could speak to them in their own language, they accepted the proposal with alacrity and served us cheerfully and well.

One grew rather tired of seeing only Chittagonian civilians, wearing their little white Mohammedan caps, and with their shirts invariably hanging outside their longyis. They were not a people who could inspire much affection, but they had their good qualities, and I was told of Chittagonians who went unconcernedly about their work in the fields while fighting raged around them. Across the Indian border there were some settlements of Arakanese Buddhists, whose forbears had fled into British territory during the Burmese invasions of Arakan at the end of the eighteenth century. They spoke their own dialect of Burmese and dressed in the Burmese fashion, and it was something of a paradox that we in North Arakan should have to cross into India to see Burmese villagers and to hear Burmese spoken.

Though on the Arakan front nothing of military interest was happening, things were going very well for the Allied forces on the other two Burma fronts. In northern Burma the area round Myitkyina and Mogaung was recaptured by the combined action of Stilwell's Chinese-American forces and the Chindits, while the Chinese had mounted an offensive from Yunnan to the east. Mogaung was taken before the end of June; Myitkyina was besieged for two and a half months, and fell at the beginning of August. On the Assam front the great Japanese offensive was halted by the middle of May, and on the 23rd June the road from Imphal to Kohima was cleared. Then began the pursuit of the Japanese by the troops of the 14th Army, which continued till the end of the war; Tamu was re-entered at the beginning of August. Sitting in what seemed to me a foreign country, I hoped – but with little optimism – that someone might realise that I knew the Mogaung area well and that I might be posted there; or at least that I might be sent back to the Kabaw Valley. But I spent the rest of the war in Arakan.

When John McTurk arrived back from leave towards the end of July, I went south to relieve George Merrells, who was CAO with 25th Indian Division. The divisional headquarters was at Maungdaw, some twenty miles south of Bawli, which in peace-time had been a township headquarters, but Merrells was living with an Engineer unit on Kappagaung, an island north of Maungdaw and joined to it by a bridge. We were here virtually on the shore of the Bay of Bengal, for Kappagaung and Maungdaw lay on the wide estuary of the Naf River, the boundary between India and Burma. Here I had

a much busier and more interesting time, for my job included elements of the duties of both a formation and a territorial CAO. The central part of my area, which included Kappagaung and Maungdaw, had been cleared of civilians, and consisted only of military units. To the north there were some villages, and a large refugee camp at Balukhali, where the people evacuated from the Maungdaw area had been settled. To the south again there were a number of villages. Merrells had evolved a routine whereby he visited Balukhali and the southern area – called Fadaungza – on a fixed day each week, allotting the whole day to the visit. The rest of the week was occupied with office work, trying cases and going into Maungdaw to keep in touch with divisional headquarters, and in particular with the Field Security Section, whose work was very much connected with ours.

Balukhali was run by an officer of the Civil Affairs welfare branch, with his staff, and medical arrangements were in the capable hands of the inimitable Arakanese doctor, Captain Kyaw Zan. One of our township officers also had his headquarters in the camp. My work with the Army was mainly of a security nature, issuing passes to Army contractors to enter protected areas, restraining civilians from cultivating too near to military camps, and so forth. Security was a matter of some importance for the Japanese were only twenty miles to the east of Maungdaw at the end of a motor road. My dealings with the staff of 25th Division were very amicable. The commander, General Davies, who did not arrive back from leave till I had been in the area a month, at once invited me to tea, and showed a considerable interest in my work and the greatest willingness to give me any assistance possible. For the first time I felt that I was part of the Army and working in co-operation with the other branches, and I should have liked to remain with this division. But I was told that my destination was 26th Division, which was said to have asked for me.

I enjoyed my short time in the Maungdaw area. There was plenty to do and the work was interesting. The main drawback was the weather: on a rainy day the flat expanse of Kappagaung, with the Naf estuary on one side of it and the wind whistling over it, could be most depressing. But north of the island on a fine sunny day the scene was a very pleasant one, with the dark-green mass of the Mayu range standing out in the distance against the blue sky, and in the foreground the light-green carpet of young paddy plants and green trees with white paddy birds perched on their topmost branches.

Merrells went into hospital in Calcutta with suspected sprue and

with a Chinese sanitary officer. I stopped on the way at the headquarters of 15th Corps, where I learned that there had recently been a Japanese infiltration into Goppe, which was my ultimate destination. 26th Division, to which I was to be attached, now had its headquarters in Bawli, and I called on General Lomax. It was agreed that I should not live with the division, but should go over to Goppe, where a brigade had its headquarters. I was told that 26th Division would soon be relieved by 82nd West African Division, and that I should remain with the new division. Edgerley, who was still SCAO, told me that I was to be entirely under the orders of the division, though I should liaise with him in such matters as obtaining staff to deal with refugees, supplies for the civil population, and so forth. When this additional work became so heavy that I could no longer manage it as well as my formation work, a full-time territorial CAO would be sent to the area.

I went to Goppe on the 18th October, with Captain Kyaw Zan, the Arakanese medical officer whom I have already mentioned, an active and cheerful little fellow who was very popular in the mess. The Japanese in their raid some twelve days previously had overrun the Civil Affairs camp, and my predecessor and his staff had had to make their way as fast as possible into the 'stronghold', where brigade headquarters and the other military units were concentrated, and where they were now living. The Japanese had carried off some civilians from the Goppe villages, and in due course I recorded statements from those who had been released or had managed to escape and return home. Meanwhile it was hardly prudent to go back to the old Civil Affairs camp outside the 'stronghold', and we continued to live under tarpaulins with brigade headquarters; very hot it became under these tarpaulins in the middle of the day. As it was difficult for civilians who wanted to see me to get into this military area, I obtained permission to build two small bamboo huts just outside the perimeter, one as an office and the other as a dispensary; as a result, our out-patient attendance rose from seven to forty a day. My staff consisted of a clerk named Abdul Rahman – an invaluable fellow – and some half a dozen policemen, while Kyaw Zan had a hospital assistant.

Here I spent the best part of two months. My work for the Army consisted of the usual issuing of passes to civilians; arranging contracts for the supply of timber, posts to support tarpaulins, hay and paddy straw for mule fodder; helping mess sergeants to buy eggs, fruit and vegetables in the local bazaar; providing guides when required, and labour to carry rations or water roads (to keep down the dust). It was my job to advise the Army on the prices which

should be paid for labour and supplies, and to assess the compensation payable for damage done to crops when roads had to be driven through them.

The West Africans took over the area from 26th Division at the beginning of November. I remained attached to the brigade operating in the Goppe area. The new Brigade Commander was most anxious that his men should get on well with the locals. He told me that all villages had been put out of bounds to troops, except for patrols and military police, and that he would like my headmen to report to me if this order was disobeyed. He thought his troops would give no trouble with the local women, but advised the villagers to keep their women at home as far as possible and, above all, not to sell any liquor to the Africans. There was little danger of this, for most Chittagonians were pretty strict Muslims and did not drink.

But it was not long before civilians began to come to me with complaints against the troops, at first mainly of a minor nature; for example, they had taken goods from a bazaar-seller without paying for them. The first African troops to arrive were from the Gold Coast. They were generally small and often cheerful fellows and they seemed to get on quite well with my civilians. But after a while they were replaced by Nigerians, tall, dour-looking men with scars on their faces, who rather frightened the locals, and shocked them by their habit of bathing naked in the river.

The worst incident in which the troops were involved during this period was at a village some miles south of Goppe. Some African soldiers had gone into the village looking for women. The villagers resisted them, with the result that the Africans killed three and set fire to many houses. I sent my police to investigate, but we were just about to start our advance, and I had to leave the settlement of the case to those who came after me. No doubt by the time the investigation was completed the culprits had moved well ahead with their unit, and the case probably fizzled out.

The most unsatisfactory feature about dealing with offences committed by military personnel was the complicated legal procedure which had to be followed and the great length of time which consequently elapsed before the case came to trial. The following is an example. I was sitting one morning in my little bamboo office when a young civilian came and complained that two Sikh sepoy belonging to a mule company, who were cutting fodder about half a mile away, had robbed him of his money as he was on his way to the bazaar. I went at once to the place with some of my police. When they saw me, the Sikhs began rummaging in a pile of freshly

cut grass, in which I found the stolen money. I arrested them and took them to their commanding officer. Two days later a very inexperienced Sikh lieutenant took a 'summary of evidence', with some assistance from me. This went to the Judge Advocate General's branch, which in due course sent it back with certain criticisms of the manner in which the evidence had been recorded. Meanwhile the advance began and the two sepoys, who had first been put under close arrest and then under open arrest, were allowed to go about their normal duties. Whether in the end anything happened to them, I did not hear, and this was a case in which the accused had been caught red-handed.

Complaints against civilians by the military were dealt with by me, and I tried cases by virtue of the magisterial powers with which I had been invested. There were very few cases, and they were generally of a petty nature, such as pilfering of Army rations. The sentence was usually a fine or a few strokes of the cane, which disposed of a case much more satisfactorily than one of imprisonment, which would have meant sending the offender back to our Civil Affairs headquarters at Bawli to serve his sentence.

I had of course a fair amount of administrative work of a non-military nature. Apart from dealing with the large number of civilians who used to attend my office every day on their own private affairs, I had the question of food supplies to consider. I arranged with Edgerley - with whom I had telephone conversations almost every day - for salt to be sent down to me for distribution to the villagers. The hill tribes of the area, Mrungs and Kumis, who practised shifting cultivation, came and said that their paddy crop had suffered severely from the depredations of birds and monkeys, and I had to issue rice to them. Once Edgerley sent me some seed potatoes for distribution among the headmen, the idea being that we should buy back part of the crop. And traders would frequently come to ask for permits to go to Chittagong District to buy goods for sale locally.

Unfortunately my movements were restricted, as my only transport was a 15 cwt truck, and at this time most of the tracks in the valley were passable only by jeeps. Unless therefore I could occasionally borrow a jeep, I was unable to go further from Goppe than I could manage in a day's walk. This meant that the main bazaar centres to the north and south of Goppe rarely saw me, and to some extent the local V Force commanders did such administrative work as was required.

V Force was primarily an intelligence organisation, which operated in several sectors of the Burma front. It had started after the British

retreat from Burma, when a number of British officers were sent into the forward areas. They gathered round them a group of local civilians and built up a network of agents operating behind the Japanese lines. No doubt V Force did much excellent work, but there was occasionally friction between it and the Civil Affairs Service. Though some of its officers had local knowledge, many had no previous experience of dealing with Eastern peoples and were inclined to put overmuch trust in the truth of what their civilian subordinates told them about the attitude of the local people. The persons employed by V Force were not the most reputable, and indeed many of their agents worked for both sides. But these people now found themselves suddenly quite important personages in their villages, as the 'staff' of the local V Force officer, and they were not averse from getting their own back on other civilians against whom they had a grudge by reporting them to V Force as being anti-British or at the least obstructive. The more sensible officers would consult us before taking any action on these reports, for in any case V Force was not concerned with civil administration. But some of the younger and more impulsive might take it upon themselves to arrest the persons reported against.

In the Kalapanzin Valley there were two V Force commanders. The one to the south of me was extremely co-operative and would consult me on the telephone about matters affecting the administration; we had a working arrangement that, until such time as I was able to pay regular visits to his area, he should have a free hand in day-to-day administrative matters, save those affecting policy. The other officer, to the north, was continually issuing orders to my headmen, threatening to arrest them, and generally acting outside his proper sphere. I tried several times to arrange a meeting with him, so that we might reach an understanding as to our respective functions, but the meeting never took place, and I was much relieved when the V Force post in that area was withdrawn.

On the Chindwin front the British advance continued. Our troops were pushing down the Kabaw Valley and through the Chin Hills, and early in December they entered Kalewa. The time had now come for the forces in Arakan to start moving too. Brigade headquarters went south from Goppe to Taung Bazaar, and towards the middle of December I joined it with my staff, consisting of my clerk Abdul Rahman, my servant Tun Che and some police. I was at last provided with my own jeep as well as a 15 cwt truck, and another CAO was sent to take over the territorial administration of the area which the Army was leaving behind. I had an interview with the Brigade Commander, Brigadier Ricketts, who showed me on a map the plan

of operations for the first few days of our offensive, so that I should know where I stood. This was the first time that any Army officer had taken the trouble to give me a clear picture of the Army's plans – perhaps a sign that it was at last realised that the Civil Affairs Service was a branch of the Army.

The 14th December was 'D-Day', and on the 15th our headquarters began to move. Soon we were passing through villages which a few days earlier had been occupied by the Japanese. Just before Christmas I moved from brigade to divisional headquarters, where I remained so long as I continued to advance. My main tasks now were to obtain labour for the troops and to listen to the complaints of villagers. Unfortunately the latter were becoming numerous, and we were moving so fast that I had little time to investigate them. I arranged, however, with the division that a fresh order should be issued putting villages out of bounds to troops, and took the first opportunity of raising the matter with the Divisional Commander, General Bruce. I told him that we were about to enter the Arakanese area, where the local people were unlikely to be so submissive as the Chittagonians had been, and that there might be serious consequences if the troops continued to misbehave. About this time the Army decided that it would be useful if the division had two CAOs, one apparently to sit in headquarters and the other to work slightly forward in liaison with the Field Security Section and the Burma Intelligence Corps. Another officer was accordingly sent, but the arrangement was not satisfactory.

The advance continued and early in January we were among Arakanese villagers, and I was at last able to speak Burmese again. But as soon as I entered a village and the people found that I could speak their language, they would come to me with complaints about the African troops. On one occasion I found two Africans making a nuisance of themselves in a village; I arrested them and handed them over to the military police. This sort of behaviour naturally had its effect on the supply of labour for military purposes, as fear of attack by the troops on their womenfolk made the men reluctant to turn out for work.

The West Africans had no animal transport of their own. The division had been provided with some mules with their Sikh attendants, but for the rest it relied on its corps of porters, known as the Auxiliary Group, to carry its baggage when motor transport was not available. These porters were military personnel and, in addition to carrying their own packs, bore up to some forty pounds' weight of baggage on their heads. When we reached the stage at which we had to send back our vehicles, I was allocated a few porters for

myself and my staff; they were from the Gold Coast and were cheerful little men. On the whole, I far preferred the Gold Coast to the Nigerian Regiments.

Hitherto the Auxiliary Group had prepared the camp sites for the next move, but, as we were now entering a more populated area, it was decided that sites for divisional headquarters should in future be made ready by civilian labour. This meant that the CAO would go ahead of the main headquarters at every move with the reconnaissance party in order to collect, instruct and pay the labour force. It was later agreed that the Field Security Section should also move with us. This arrangement suited me well, as it meant that we could move in our own time, and that I could be well settled and in touch with the local villagers before divisional headquarters arrived. Fortunately my relations with Captain Leslie of the Field Security Section and his staff of three sergeants were very cordial; one of them was a Burmese speaker.

On the 5th January we learned that Akyab, the district headquarters, had been captured a few days earlier by 25th Indian Division, and that our division was to cross over into the valley of the Kaladan River to the east, to relieve 81st West African Division, which had been advancing southwards down the valley. A range of hills separated us from the Kaladan. It was possible to cross them by jeep, but orders were issued that only a limited number of jeeps would be permitted to go over; all other motor transport was to be sent back, and mine went with it. My little unit now consisted of Abdul Rahman, Tun Che, three policemen, the staff's cook and our Auxiliary Group porters.

General Bruce, who was suffering from a poisoned foot, had meanwhile been relieved by General Stockwell (later Sir Hugh Stockwell), who sent for me two days after assuming command to discuss the behaviour of the troops in the villages. He said that he wished me to report to him any incidents which came to my notice, and that he would have no hesitation in removing any Battalion Commander whose men were frequently involved.

Our move to the Kaladan Valley was delayed for a few hours by the visit of the Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, who arrived by air and spent an hour with the division. He met all the officers, and had a brief chat with me about the Mogaung area, having discovered that I had served there in peacetime. He then gave a short address. Rumour had it that he enjoyed standing on soap boxes to make his speeches, and the Deputy Adjutant was hovering about with a box held behind his back which, however, he was not called upon to produce.

In the Kaladan Valley we generally found the villages deserted as a result of Allied bombing, though my inquiries almost invariably elicited the information that the Japanese had withdrawn two or three days before the air raid. The people were living in huts in the fields, but they were not far away, and they soon came back when they heard that a Burmese-speaking officer had arrived. Wherever I stopped, I made copious notes about the political and economic situation and the principal needs of the people, and sent them back to our local Civil Affairs headquarters for the use of whichever officer should be sent to administer the area. As we advanced further, former government employees – members of the police, the sanitary services, revenue surveyors and occasionally administrative officers – came and reported to me. I had authority to pay them a certain amount of salary, provided that there was no reason to believe that their conduct during the Japanese occupation had been improper. They began to help me to collect labour for the Army.

The Japanese had made large issues of their own paper currency in Burma and the other occupied territories of South-East Asia. After careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of recognising the Japanese currency, it had been decided not to do so, and our payments were made in Indian currency notes overprinted 'British Military Administration, Burma'. At this stage, when Japanese currency was valueless and our notes had yet to find their value, the people preferred payment in kind for their labour, and what they particularly wanted was cloth. A considerable amount of this was available in the form of parachutes which had come down with supply drops, and I used to fix the price of work or local supplies in terms of pieces of parachute cloth.

81st West African Division coming down the Kaladan Valley from the north, and our own division advancing from the west, were now converging on Myohaung, the old capital of the Arakanese kings. It was decided that 81st Division should occupy the town on the 24th January, after which it would be withdrawn from Arakan. On the previous day I arrived at a place some five miles west of Myohaung with the Field Security Section and the reconnaissance party consisting of one platoon of troops, to select a camp site for the next move of divisional headquarters. I settled into a fairly substantial house in the village, made the usual arrangements for labour, and the following morning was busy on the camp site ensuring that the labourers understood what they had to do.

As I was returning to my house, I saw from a distance a crowd of civilians in front of it, surrounding a man who was tied with a rope. I assumed that this was some miscreant brought to me for

trial; I was hot and tired and certainly in no mood to settle down to try a case. As I approached, I saw that the prisoner was dressed in a white shirt and had a short towel round his waist; he was somewhat battered about the head, looked unusually fair-skinned and had a few days' growth of beard. Before I reached the crowd, someone shouted to me that a Japanese had been caught, and this was indeed the case. I had never before seen a Japanese prisoner. Until the collapse of the Japanese Army began, prisoners were very rarely taken; the Japanese soldier preferred death to capture. I went to the officer in command of the reconnaissance party and asked him if he could look after a Japanese prisoner for me; he laughed and said he was always ready to do that. When I produced my prisoner, he had the surprise of his life. The Divisional Commander had promised fifty rupees for every prisoner, and I paid this out at once to the men who had captured this Japanese. I later heard that they were somewhat aggrieved at my having appeared and taken the man off their hands, as they were hoping to hand him over to V Force, which paid higher prices for prisoners.

When I entered Myohaung two days after its capture, the town was completely deserted. Japanese ammunition and clothes were lying everywhere, evidence of the enemy's very hurried exit. Later I found quantities of bombs and grenades scattered about the town. For the next few days I was busy with civilian visitors, especially with government servants coming in to report. I met the CAO with 81st Division, who had engaged a number of local people, mainly police, to start an administration; these he handed over to me before he left the area. On the day after my arrival I was informed that some troops had found a quantity of files and other documents in a field. Myohaung had been the district headquarters during the Japanese occupation, and these papers proved to be the records of the district office. I later found a good deal of interest in them; it was amusing to see that the Burmese civil officials and the Japanese Army had to correspond with each other in English, the only language which they had in common.

I now received orders that I was to report to the headquarters of the Senior Civil Affairs Officer, now in Akyab, to await posting, probably as SCAO myself in some other district. I represented, however, that it was essential that a CAO should be stationed in Myohaung, and my instructions were altered: I was to detach myself from 82nd Division and to stay in Myohaung as territorial CAO. I got a lift to Akyab in a small American L-5 aircraft, which carried only a single passenger behind the pilot, and spent a few days there. I was told that I could use my discretion about engaging staff for

the administration, and I made arrangements for rations to be sent for them. When I returned to Myohaung on the 5th February, I found the last of the Army moving out.

Myohaung had a long history. Its name is Burmese and means simply the 'old town'; the old Arakanese name was Mrauku. Early archaeological remains have been found there which show pronounced Indian features. In the middle of the fifteenth century King Naramaikla of Arakan came to the conclusion that the site of his existing capital was ill-omened; his astrologers told him that Myohaung was an auspicious site for a new capital, but that, if he moved, he would die within the year. Expressing the view that his own life was of little importance in comparison with the good of his people, he founded Myohaung in 1433 and died the following year. Myohaung remained the capital of Arakan till the country was conquered by the Burmese in 1785.

It has been described in its heyday as 'an eastern Venice, like modern Bangkok, a city of lagoons and canals, connected with the sea by tidal rivers. Its outer walls had a circumference of about twelve miles' (D.G.E. Hall, *Burma*). King Minbin (1531-53) fortified it with strong walls and a deep moat to withstand siege by the Burmese. Myohaung was at the height of its prosperity in the seventeenth century. European travellers painted glowing pictures of its wealth, and one of them described it as the richest city in that part of Asia. In those days Arakan was far more advanced than Burma through its contacts with people of other races. Merchants from many foreign countries traded in Myohaung and the Dutch for many years had a factory (trading settlement) there. As in so many eastern capitals, there was a palace-city within the walls, which was built on an eminence and dominated the town. Myohaung was taken by the British in 1825 and, by the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) which ended the First Burmese War, Arakan was ceded to Britain.

The old palace buildings had long vanished, and the government offices had taken their place, for Myohaung became the headquarters of a subdivision in the Akyab District. When I entered Myohaung, there was not a single building left on the Nanragon (the palace hill) except the small strongroom in which the government treasury had formerly been housed. There was also a tall wooden post covered with Japanese characters, which was said to commemorate the heroic deeds of the Imperial Japanese Army. On several occasions I was asked by the townspeople why I did not have it pulled down; I felt, however, that it served to mark an incident in the history of Myohaung, and it was still standing when I left. In the rest of the town

many private houses had been destroyed, though there had been less damage on the outskirts.

Myohaung was by nature admirably adapted to defence against attack by land or water. Around it to the north and east was a series of hills, the narrow gaps between which were easily filled with stone; to the west were numbers of tidal creeks; and to the south were two fair-sized lakes. Three or four pagodas of historic interest had been scheduled as archaeological monuments and had been maintained at government expense. The chief of these was the great Shitthaung Pagoda; the name means 'eighty thousand', perhaps because at one time it had contained that number of statues of the Buddha. It was an unusual type of pagoda: around the central shrine was a double row of cloisters, and it has been described as 'more a fortress than a pagoda, ... undoubtedly used as a place to which members of the Order could retire, were the city attacked' (Collis, *The Land of the Great Image*). It was certainly used by the Japanese in these circumstances, for, when I visited it two days after my arrival in Myohaung, there was abundant evidence of their recent presence in the outer cloister. Food was scattered about, and I even found the enamel container from a commode.

My first task was to re-establish an administration in the area, and it was a most interesting and satisfying experience to watch it start virtually from nothing and gradually consolidate itself. Most of the staff handed over to me in Myohaung had been over-hastily recruited, had never been government employees and had to be discharged almost at once. But all government servants living in the vicinity came and reported to me and, as soon as there was work for them to do, I re-engaged them, provided that there was no adverse report of their behaviour during the Japanese occupation. Police were sent from Akyab, under an elderly Inspector of pre-war days, and in due course I received township officers for my two headquarters of Myohaung and Kyauktaw, and a young Assistant Township Officer. We took over a number of houses in the western quarter of Myohaung for government use. They were still in good condition, and I supplemented them by building a few bamboo huts. We soon had a fair-sized bamboo building ready for our hospital, which was under the charge of an Arakanese doctor. On the ground floor of the house used as a police station we prepared a lock-up.

Within a few days I was able to send a Township Officer and his staff to Kyauktaw on a steamer which had come to us with rations. Soon afterwards two platoons of Tripura Rifles arrived on attachment to us; they were commanded by a young Lieutenant Burman (or Varman), a relation of the Maharajah of Tripura. A Signals

detachment also came to us, to maintain our wireless communications with Akyab and the other administrative centres of the district. We constructed an airstrip for use in the dry season, which involved merely cutting down the bunds over a wide area of paddy field and levelling the uneven portions. The strip was ready on the 1st March and the next day our first aircraft landed with mails; a thrice-weekly service was thereafter operated. Before long the relief (or welfare) branch of the Civil Affairs Service sent us a Sikh Lieutenant to open a supply shop in Myohaung, at which the people could purchase their requirements of cloth goods and other essential commodities.

Now that I was no longer attached to an Army formation on the frontier, but was administering an area well inside Burma, I inevitably became involved in some degree in internal Burmese politics. I have described in Chapter Ten how a resistance movement had started among the extreme left wing Thakins even before the British had left Burma in 1942. The Communist sympathies of this left wing made it naturally hostile to the Fascist powers. I have told how Thein Pe and Tin Shwe came to India to ask for British assistance, and how they were put in touch with Force 136. I must now trace briefly the history of this association, first emphasising that much of what I am about to relate did not come to my knowledge till long afterwards, and that even the high command was kept considerably in the dark in the early days.

Force 136 was a branch of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), originally formed for clandestine warfare in Europe. This organisation was responsible directly through the Minister of Economic Warfare to the War Cabinet. It did not come under the Army nor was Force 136 ever under the control of the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia Command. Its responsibilities towards the military and political authorities were not clearly defined, and consequently a considerable part of its activities took place without the knowledge of either. In the early stages these activities were directed to the obtaining of intelligence from inside Burma and the establishment of contacts which might be useful later. The result of the association of Force 136 with Thein Pe and Tin Shwe was inevitably that these contacts were largely with extreme left wing elements. I have mentioned that Tin Shwe was sent back into Burma in the dry season of 1942-43, and that he brought back an Arakanese called Nyo Tun. In the next open season Nyo Tun was sent back into Arakan overland, and, when he eventually emerged about the middle of 1944, he brought back information that Arakan had its own underground movement under a notorious monk called U Pyinnyathiha.

On the 1st August 1944, the first anniversary of the establishment by the Japanese of the puppet independent Government of Burma under Dr Ba Maw, the leaders of the resistance held a conference at which the Anti-Fascist Organisation (AFO) was formed. This was a group of parties, dominated by the Thakins, who now formed the national front of the resistance; they ranged from moderate to extreme left wing. It was not, however, till considerably later that anything of this was known to our intelligence organisations. General Aung San, the Commander-in-Chief of the Burma National Army, was the leading spirit in the formation of this united front, and he declared that he and his army would lead the nation in revolt against the Japanese as soon as the time was ripe. Shortly after this some soldiers of the Burma National Army were captured by our troops on the Chindwin front, and they said that they had been told by their officers that they must be prepared, when the time came, to rise against the Japanese. The Burma National Army was some 10,000 strong; it had Burmese officers, and Japanese sergeant instructors.

About the same time, Thein Pe – now working with Force 136 – prepared a document in which he asked for trust in the Thakins, for the arming of civilian guerrillas and for the post-war Burma Army to be built up on a foundation of these guerrillas. The commander of Force 136, apparently without consulting anyone, informed Thein Pe that he recognised him and his associates as the 'Anti-Axis Association of Burma', that he would give them full military support, but that the question of the absorption of the guerrillas into the Burma Army was one for the Government of Burma to decide. He added, however, that, if the guerrillas showed their worth, the government would be unable to ignore their demands. Neither the Supreme Allied Commander nor the Chief Civil Affairs Officer had any knowledge of these negotiations. It appears that the Government of Burma was aware of them. But the government, acting on the advice of the two Burmese Ministers (including the late Premier Sir Paw Tun) who had come out to India, took the line that the Thakins and their associates were by no means representative of the Burmese people, who indeed hated them for the atrocities committed by the Burma Independence Army, and that after the war they would be of no account; meanwhile there could be no harm in making use of them. This was the cardinal error: it was not realised now, nor till long afterwards, that the Anti-Fascist Organisation had become a Burmese national front, whose aim was independence for Burma.

Now that the Allied offensive was well under way, the role of Force 136 changed from the collection of intelligence to the more

active one of harassing the Japanese, and it was about this time that its activities came to the notice of General Pearce, the Chief Civil Affairs Officer. The 81st West African Division, advancing down the Kaladan Valley, captured a number of civilians who were wanted for murder and collaboration with the Japanese. These persons claimed to belong to guerrillas raised by Force 136, and General Pearce had little option but to grant them an amnesty. And this sort of thing continued as our advance proceeded. But now at length protests from 14th Army at their ignorance of the activities of Force 136 led to the establishment of closer liaison and control.

In February, Force 136, making plans for the extensive arming of members of the AFO Civil Affairs, protested on the ground that the organisation was an extremist group with communist affinities, and that to encourage it now by asking for its assistance would lead to political difficulties after the war was over; an armed left wing would imperil the security of the country. General Leese, Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia (ALFSEA) – the successor to 11th Army Group – upheld the Civil Affairs objection and ordered that no further arms should be supplied to the underground movement. But Force 136 appealed to Admiral Mountbatten, who reversed the ruling. His view was not only that no offer of assistance against the Japanese should be rejected, but that, with Kachin, Karen and other tribes already armed as guerrillas, a refusal to accept similar help from the Burmese might ultimately lead to his having to divert his troops to suppress the Burma National Army. He ordered, however, that arms were to be issued only to specified individuals for specific operations; they were not to be issued to the AFO as an organisation. This ruling, however, proved impossible to enforce.

As soon as I started to work in Myohaung, I met members of these Force 136 guerrillas. Before the reoccupation of the district a dossier had been compiled of known criminals and collaborators. By this time we knew that many of these people would turn up as our gallant allies of the resistance, and we had been instructed that no action should be taken against any of them save for specific offences against other persons. Force 136 had undertaken to supply Civil Affairs with a list of the local members of the 'Patriotic Front', as they were called, so that he could ensure that the amnesty was not extended to those who were not entitled to it. But it seemed that Force 136 had no authoritative list of their own; they apparently had to rely on the local leaders to produce lists of their men, and there was of course nothing to prevent these leaders from including certain wanted men who had never taken part in the activities of the 'Patriotic Front'.

We were perturbed by the amount of arms and explosives left in the area. Besides those issued by Force 136, there were those which had been abandoned by the Japanese in their retreat. Our troops too, when they moved on, had left a house in Myohaung full of ammunition; I had to place a police guard on it for about a month till the Army made arrangements for some of the ammunition to be removed and the rest destroyed. Japanese bombs had been left lying about the town, and there were also some Allied bombs which had failed to explode when dropped. I asked for a bomb disposal squad, who spent about ten days in Myohaung and exploded all the bombs that they could find. From time to time a villager would be brought to our hospital who had picked up something which proved to be a grenade and had had part of his hand blown off.

The Inspector and I toured our charge as much as we could. Our only permanent transport was a sampan, rowed by a man employed by the police, and our tours were naturally restricted in range, for we could not be away too long from our headquarters. Occasionally, however, we had the use of a tug sent from Akyab for our longer tours. Our main objects as we went round the villages were to assure the people that the Japanese had gone for good and the British administration was back, to call on all persons in possession of firearms to bring them in for licensing, and to ask for the villagers' co-operation with the police in reporting the presence and movements of dacoit gangs. For there were frequent reports of the presence of armed gangs from various parts of our jurisdiction; some were former members of the 'Patriotic Front' or persons who had been closely connected with them; others no doubt were criminals pure and simple, taking advantage of the unsettled condition of the countryside and their possession of firearms. Meanwhile it was necessary to re-establish the village administration on a formal basis. Where the pre-war headman was still available and willing to carry on, he was reappointed. In other cases the headman appointed under the Ba Maw administration was confirmed, provided that nothing serious was known against him. As was but natural the personal enemies of this latter group of headmen would come and say how they had collaborated with the Japanese and oppressed the villagers, but, unless some specific crime was alleged – and I do not remember that it ever was – I normally refused to investigate the matter. I had no doubt that the majority of the headmen had done their best in difficult circumstances and had sometimes had no choice but to assist the Japanese; and I could not see that any useful purpose would be served by my dismissing all those who had been appointed by the puppet Burmese administration.

One of my early tours took me to two villages somewhat removed from the main waterways to which many of the Arakanese gentry had withdrawn at the time of the Japanese invasion. They had remained in these secluded villages throughout the occupation and were, I think, genuinely glad to see us back. The educated Arakanese had always mixed socially with the European much more easily than the Burman did, and these men were government officials, serving or retired, and prominent business men. These little communities made such arrangements as they could to welcome me and to celebrate the arrival of the first British official since our evacuation. I was invited to meals in their houses, and one evening a Burmese *pwè* was organised. The people were really out to enjoy themselves, and one of the items in the *pwè* was a song composed in my honour.

Life in Myohaung returned gradually to normal. The townsfolk were eager to come back and rebuild their houses. I would not permit them to do so till I had obtained adequate information as to land rights, for I did not want to let a man build his house on a plot of land, only to find that someone else claimed the land. I was able to re-engage the former Myohaung revenue surveyor, and he produced a plan of the pre-war layout showing the owners of each plot. Building was further delayed by the difficulty experienced in obtaining materials, but little by little houses began to rise – of semi-permanent construction with timber floors and walls of bamboo matting – and Myohaung again wore the appearance of an inhabited town.

I inspected all the historic pagodas to find out what repairs, if any, were needed. One of the smaller ones had collapsed on one side, but most of them required only to be cleared of grass and scrub. No maintenance had been carried out since the Japanese invasion, and I thought that, for both archaeological and political reasons, it would be a good move to pay for the pagodas to be cleared. I obtained permission to do this, and the local people turned up willingly to work; they even agreed to give one day's labour free. When we had finished the pagodas, we started clearing the site of the old palace-city and the walls. Before the war a collection of old stone inscriptions had been housed in a small building near the government offices. These I found lying scattered, some with pieces broken off. I was fortunately able to find the former caretaker who, to my surprise, produced from memory a diagram showing where each stone had stood, and could tell me exactly how many were missing. In fact very few were lost, and I had the stones collected and set up in a temporary shed until such time as an archaeological expert could come and examine them.

It was now March. The 14th Army advancing southwards had crossed the Irrawaddy and taken Meiktila and was now preparing for the assault on Mandalay, whose capture would complete the reconquest of Upper Burma. Meanwhile contacts with the underground movement had been intensified, prominent among the members of the latter being Thakin Than Tun, a minister in the Ba Maw administration. Early in March news was received that on the 16th the Burma National Army would leave Rangoon for the Irrawaddy front, ostensibly to fight with the Japanese against the Allied troops, but that in fact the Burmese troops would come over to the Allied side. The rising took place on the 27th March.

Admiral Mountbatten had had to consider what attitude he should adopt towards the Burma National Army. Should he accept their co-operation and give them full recognition and support, or should he decline their assistance on the ground that they were disreputable and extremist elements, lacking the support of the majority of their own people, and moreover many of them guilty of criminal acts and of treason towards the legitimate government? His military commanders considered that the rising of the Burma National Army should be supported on operational grounds; on political grounds the Chief Civil Affairs Officer pointed out the dangers of such a course and the offence which it would give to the more respectable elements of the population. Mountbatten put both views before the Chiefs of Staff, recommending that the rising should be supported, and the Chiefs of Staff referred the problem to the India Committee of the War Cabinet. On the 20th March this Committee approved Mountbatten's recommendation, but emphasised that no undue publicity must be given to the part played by the Burma National Army; that its leaders must not be allowed to consider their contribution of great importance; that they must be warned that they had much to do to atone for their past collaboration with the Japanese; and that no grounds should be given to them for thinking that they would have any claim to political control or concessions after the return of the Civil Government.

The help of the Burma National Army was accordingly accepted, and overnight the term 'BTA' (Burma Traitor Army) in military communiqués was changed to 'PBF' (Patriotic Burmese Forces)! I think it is important to stress that the views taken by most of us officers in the field were coloured by two fundamental misconceptions. In the first place, many of us were not aware that the rising of the Burma National Army against the Japanese had been planned long ago; we assumed that it was the certainty that the Japanese were now defeated that had caused the Burmese forces to desert

them for the winning side. And secondly neither we nor, for that matter, anyone else either in the Civil Affairs Service or in the emigré Government of Burma realised how large a measure of popular support was commanded by the supposedly left-wing and unrepresentative elements which had combined to form the Anti-Fascist Organisation – or Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), as it now began to call itself.

In Myohaung the maintenance of law and order was still a matter giving us considerable concern. The air was full of rumours of armed gangs, some merely criminals, others (as I have said) members of the guerrilla groups which had been employed by Force 136. The monk U Pyinnyathiha, who has already been mentioned, had been the head of the underground movement which called itself the 'Arakan Defence Force'. After the reoccupation of Akyab District Force 136 arranged for him and his principal lieutenant Kra Hla Aung to be taken to India for a holiday and as a reward for their services. The headquarters of U Pyinnyathiha's secret organisation had been a little village in my area called Pyade, which I always found a most unfriendly place, in marked contrast to the other villages. Though most of the headmen had hastened to report themselves when the administration was re-established in Myohaung, neither the pre-war headman of Pyade nor the headmen appointed by the Ba Maw Government had done so. On my first visit to the village, I asked to see them but, though I waited for two hours, neither appeared. There was an air of aloofness – almost of hostility – about the whole village and hardly anyone came to speak to me.

In the latter half of March arrangements were made by our headquarters in Akyab for a wing of the Royal Air Force Regiment to tour the more disturbed areas of the district with the object of rounding up wanted persons and searching villages for hidden firearms. It consisted entirely of British troops, who spent a little over three weeks with me. For most of that time I accompanied them, explaining to the villagers that we had not come to give them any trouble, but to search for arms so that criminally-minded persons might not get hold of them. We visited a very large number of villages and searched many houses. The material results of this operation were but meagre: a few arms and explosives and some other military stores were recovered, but, so far as I can recall, no wanted men. But I think that the moral effect of British troops marching through the countryside was very beneficial. Though none of them spoke the local language, they succeeded in the British soldier's inimitable manner in cultivating friendly relations with the people. In one place the villagers arranged a *pwè* for them, and they

were delighted with a young Arakanese boy who got up and sang an English song, 'Pistol-packing Momma'. Sometimes, if the patrol party was not too large, the people would arrange a curry meal for us when we arrived for a halt in a village. But the highlight of the operation was when we were returning by tug from our last trip and landed to have our lunch in a village. It was the time of the Burmese New Year, when it is customary for people to throw water at each other. The festival had, I understood, been little observed during the Japanese occupation when – as they used to tell me – they felt in no mood to be gay, and now the villagers were determined to have a real New Year again. Our troops joined in the fun and caused much hilarity. They ended by distributing a good deal of their surplus rations in the village and, as our tug moved off, the whole of the usually undemonstrative Arakanese population lined the banks and cheered.

While the RAF Regiment was in the area, poor Burman, who was in command of the Tripura Rifles, died. So far as we could make out, his death was due to hydrophobia. He passed on his last requests to me, and I conveyed them in a letter to the Maharaja. Shortly afterwards the Tripuras were replaced by a company of Gurkhas of the Burma Regiment; company headquarters and one platoon were stationed in Myohaung.

It was now two months or more since U Pyinnyathiha and Kra Hla Aung had been taken to Calcutta, and the rumour was gaining currency among their followers that they had in fact been detained there and would not be allowed to come back. Reports came in that Kra Ni Aung, the brother of Kra Hla Aung, was planning a revolt; arms, it was said, were being collected by former members of the 'Arakan Defence Force' with a view to a rising at Pyade before the end of April. On the day after my return to Myohaung after my tour with the RAF Regiment I received a message from the officer in charge of a small police outpost to the effect that there were armed men in uniform in the neighbourhood and that he feared an attack. Fortunately a motor launch had arrived that afternoon from Akyab bringing a new doctor, so I took a section of Gurkhas to the outpost and left them there. In the event nothing happened. A few days later I heard that another group of armed and uniformed men under Kra Ni Aung was at a village a few miles north of Myohaung. I sent some troops, but they reported that the villagers were unwilling to speak. So I went myself and entered the village at dawn. One or two of the villagers, who were said to have taken a leading part in entertaining the gang, were not to be found, but I called the others together and warned them that their village would be burned if the

gang continued in the area and information was not at once given to me. I left a Gurkha section to stay there for about a week in the hope that they might capture some of the gang.

On the 1st May I went down to Pyade, the reported centre of the rebellion. I found it just as unfriendly as ever and was about to leave when, by an extraordinary coincidence, U Pyinnyathiha and Kra Hla Aung arrived, having just returned from Calcutta. Seeing a British officer, the monk came towards me with his hands outstretched and muttered a welcome in broken English. When he learned who I was and that I could speak his language, we sat down and had a long talk. I told him that his followers were reported to be organising a rising because they thought that he was being kept in Calcutta; that I wanted him to send messages to them at once to say that he was back and that their preparations must be stopped; and that I then looked to him for assistance in bringing in all the arms that were in their possession. He gave the appearance of being friendly and ready to co-operate, and I think he was genuinely surprised to learn what Kra Ni Aung and his men had been doing.

A few days later Nyo Tun and Kra Hla Aung came to my office. I have mentioned Nyo Tun previously as an early member of the resistance movement who had twice during the Japanese occupation of Burma made his way into India with information. He was an educated man, unlike U Pyinnyathiha and Kra Hla Aung, quite young and spoke good English, and I liked what little I saw of him. He and Kra Hla Aung said they were trying to gather in all the arms and to hand over to me the wanted men in the gangs; meanwhile they asked that we should not yet start making arrests. It was difficult to know how far they were to be trusted, but the question proved to be of merely academic interest to me, for a few days later I was no longer in Myohaung.

During April I had been promoted to be a Deputy SCAO with the rank of Major, and John McTurk, who was now SCAO, had told me that he would like me to come to Akyab to assist him. Towards the end of April my successor arrived. Having introduced him to the routine work of the office and taken him on two short tours, I prepared to depart. Before I left two important events happened in the war. The troops of 14th Army had been advancing at speed into Lower Burma in order to reach Rangoon before the rains broke. They were forestalled by 15th Corps, which mounted a seaborne attack from Arakan. It was my old division (26th Indian Division) which landed in the Rangoon River on the 2nd May, and entered the city on the following day, to find that the Japanese had already withdrawn. And three days before I was due to leave Myohaung

news came of the surrender of Germany, followed the next day by the announcement of the end of the war in Europe. On my last night I gave a dinner party, to which were invited the officers of the station and a number of prominent unofficial Arakanese guests to whom hurried invitations had been sent. This party served the dual purpose of celebrating the defeat of Germany and my departure from the old capital, which I had seen built for the second time, and of which I felt that I might with some justification claim to have been the second founder. I left for Akyab the next day, and returned to Myohaung only once a few weeks later to complete the trial of some criminal cases which I had left unfinished.

The town of Akyab had suffered severely from Allied air raids. There were no civilians living in it now, and the few habitable buildings were occupied by military units. The Civil Affairs headquarters was some six miles away at a place called Narigan, where a large camp had been built. Most of the buildings were bamboo huts, but it was by no means uncomfortable.

After the recapture of Rangoon, General Pearce, the CCAO, had urged upon Admiral Mountbatten the desirability of declaring the AFPFL and its army illegal, and of arresting Aung San and bringing him to trial for treason. This attitude was fundamentally opposed to Mountbatten's own, and on the 10th May he replaced Pearce by General Rance, a military officer with no knowledge as yet of Burma and the Burmese, but who was later to become – as Sir Hubert Rance – the last Governor of Burma. Pearce took Rance round the Civil Affairs stations, and they came to us a few days after my arrival in Narigan, accompanied by Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté, who was the Deputy Chief of Staff for Information and Civil Affairs at Mountbatten's headquarters. They had dinner in our mess and just after we started a great gecko or house lizard – in Burma called a tuctoo – dropped from the roof and landed with a resounding smack in front of Rance's soup. These creatures were often a foot long or more, and I think Rance had only recently arrived in the East and had never seen one before. His reaction may well be imagined.

Three days later (17th May) the British Government published a White Paper in which it declared its future policy towards Burma. Ever since he had left the country the Governor had been urging on the British Government the importance of making a clear pronouncement on Burma's future after the war. Both he and the British Government accepted the fact that there would have to be a period of direct rule by the Governor, without either a Council of Ministers or a Legislature, while the plans for reconstruction were put into

operation. Dorman-Smith suggested that this period might last for five to seven years; at the end of this time a free parliament would be elected and Burma would be handed over to the Burmese a prosperous country again. But the Cabinet, engrossed in the war, refused to consider the matter and to fix a time limit to the period of the Governor's direct rule. In December 1944, a group of young Conservative Members of Parliament published a 'Blue Print for Burma', in which they proposed that the Governor should exercise direct rule for six years, during which period he should not only restore the country to its former condition, but should also draw up a new constitution for an independent Burma with Dominion status. The Blue Print was debated in the Commons, but the Government would not yet declare its policy. Now, however, it was announced that the period of direct rule by the Governor would last for three years; elections would then be had, and the Burmese would put forward their own proposals for a form of constitution which would give them full self-government within the Commonwealth. This meant a considerable reduction in the period of direct rule previously envisaged, but it was unfortunate that the British Government gave no indication of the length of the second stage and of the target date for the achievement of full self-government, and it soon became evident that the terms of the White Paper were unlikely to commend themselves to the AFPFL.

For on the previous day (16th May) General Aung San had arrived by invitation at General Slim's headquarters. This young man of thirty began by informing the commander of the victorious 14th Army that he came as the representative of the Provisional Government of Burma, which had been established by the people of Burma through the AFPFL. He said that, as commander of that government's national army, he was prepared to co-operate with the British, provided that he was recognised as, and accorded the status of, an Allied commander. Slim replied that, so far as he was concerned, there was only one Government of Burma, which was His Majesty's Government, now acting through the Supreme Allied Commander, South-East Asia; he could defeat the Japanese without the assistance of Aung San's forces; and, if he accepted their offer of help, it was on the clear understanding that this implied no recognition of any provisional government, and that Aung San would be regarded merely as a subordinate commander who would obey the orders of Slim or of any other British commander under whom they were placed. He also took the opportunity to point out to Aung San that he was liable to be brought to trial for his past actions. At a subsequent interview, when Slim told him that after the war the old

regular Burma Army would be revived, Aung San asked that his forces should be incorporated as units in the new army; Slim gave him no reason to hope that this might be agreed, though he said that suitable individuals might well be accepted for enlistment. How would the leaders of the provisional government of what they claimed to be a sovereign and independent Burma view the British Government's proposal that a British Governor should rule their country for three years without a parliament, after which an unspecified period would elapse before Burma would govern herself? It should also be noted that the proposals outlined in the White Paper were not to apply to the hill areas inhabited by the Chins, Kachins, Shans and Karens unless these people specifically expressed a desire to become merged with Burma proper.

My first task in Narigan was to dispose of the arrears of routine office work which had accumulated as a result of the preoccupation of the senior officers with establishing law and order. For example, all criminal cases tried by a subordinate magistrate had to be reviewed by the SCAO or his deputy. This was very necessary, for some of the persons appointed to be magistrates in the Military Administration had never exercised magisterial powers before. I found that of some three hundred cases tried since the beginning of the year only about fifty had been duly reviewed, and I set to work to dispose of the rest. I then turned to financial matters. All civilian employees of the Civil Affairs Service were issued with what was known as a pay/pension book. These books were also to be issued to Burma Government servants and pensioners who had not been re-employed when they applied for arrears of pay or pension; thereafter they would come in monthly for payment. But before any arrears could be paid – they were limited to three months in the first instance – and books issued, a board of inquiry appointed locally had to record a finding that the conduct of the applicants during the period of the enemy occupation had been fit and proper. This work was also in arrears. Other routine office work consisted in arranging for the regular despatch of rations and stores to our outstations, periodically checking the cash balance in the Treasury, and occasionally trying criminal cases.

The rains began soon after I left Myohaung. Our main centres could in any case be reached only by water, and we continued to pay them frequent visits. John McTurk and I generally took it in turns to go on tour. Once I went back to my old stamping-ground of 1944 – Bawli and Kappagaung – and found it greatly changed. In place of military camps and dusty roads there were now thriving villages and green paddy fields. The area was still completely

Chittagonian, but the people had a pretty good idea that it could not be long before the Arakanese refugees were allowed back. One of the Muslim Township Officers assured me, in the course of this tour, that a promise had been given in 1943 by one of our earliest Civil Affairs Officers that North Arakan would remain exclusively Muslim for ever. Since, as I have explained, large parts had been predominantly Arakanese Buddhist before the war, it was inconceivable to me that any such promise could have been given. The claim smacked a little too much of Mr Mohammed Ali Jinnah, whose map of the future state of Pakistan was said to have included north Arakan. Before I left Arakan we were making preliminary plans for resettling the Arakanese in the north.

On my last tour I tried my first and last murder case. I had been invested with the powers of a Special Judge, which meant that I could try almost any case. A young Arakanese was accused of murdering his wife. He admitted doing so, and said that he had killed her because she had committed adultery with a Japanese soldier. He gave his evidence in a perfectly straightforward manner and I accepted it as true. I could do no other, as the law stood, than find him guilty of murder, for which there were but two penalties, death or transportation for life (which in practice meant imprisonment for twenty years). I sentenced him to the latter, but would gladly have given him a lesser sentence, had I been able to do so.

Meanwhile negotiations had been going on between our military leaders and Aung San about the future of the Burma National Army, now officially known as the Patriotic Burmese Forces. After much discussion and a good deal of misunderstanding, it was agreed that its personnel should proceed to centres where they would hand in their arms and be paid off and disbanded. Those who wished could register for enlistment into the regular Burma Army and would be accepted if they were found medically fit. Disbandment and registration began at the end of June, and continued for the rest of the year, by which time 8,324 members of the Patriotic Burmese Forces had passed through the centres, of whom 4,763 had applied for enrolment in the Burma Army. Of the 3,500 who did not apply many appeared before long as members of the People's Volunteer Organisation (PVO), which I shall have occasion to mention in subsequent chapters. Some 14,000 weapons of all kinds were handed in, but I think no one was under any delusion but that a very large number had not been surrendered.

The views of Mountbatten on the one hand, and of the Government of Burma and the senior officers of the Civil Affairs Service on the other, on the attitude which should be adopted towards Aung

San and his colleagues were entirely different. Immediately after Aung San's meeting with Slim, Mountbatten asked the Governor if Aung San might be told that, on the restoration of Civil Government, the Governor would consider including representatives of the AFPFL in his advisory council. Dorman-Smith did not wish to commit himself at this stage and refused to associate himself with any such undertaking. Mountbatten took the view that with proper handling Aung San might prove to be another Smuts or Botha; his policy was to treat him with respect and to offer him full co-operation. The Burma Government and Mountbatten's Civil Affairs advisers adhered to the argument that the AFPFL leaders were extremists who did not represent the Burmese people, and that to cultivate them now would have unfortunate repercussions after the return of the Civil Government. In July Mountbatten called to Rangoon the senior officers of the Civil Affairs Service, told them that it was his policy to work with Aung San and the AFPFL leaders, and directed them to conform to his policy. Aung San was offered an appointment as a Deputy Inspector-General in the Burma Army, but declined it on the ground that his colleagues in the AFPFL wished him to give up his military career and enter politics.

At the end of the first week in August the Americans dropped their atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Japanese made their offer of surrender. On the 15th August they accepted the Allied terms and the war in Asia was at an end. It took some days, however, before the local Japanese command received its instructions and acted on them. We celebrated the end of the war with parties and sports, and decided that henceforth Sunday should be an office holiday; up to this time we had all worked a seven-day week.

A few days later John McTurk departed for India on a month's leave, and I took over the district in his absence. A week later instructions came that I was to report to Rangoon for posting as a SCAO. The Deputy CCAO in Arakan - who was now virtually the equivalent of the peace-time Commissioner - said that he could not release me till McTurk's return. The issue was postponed for another ten days, when orders came that I was required immediately for posting to a new area. I found that there were now no regular air services operated by the RAF between Akyab and Rangoon, though there was occasionally an aircraft making the journey. I spent another week in trying to find some means of reaching Rangoon direct either by air or by sea, till it finally became clear that I should have to fly to Calcutta and make my way thence. These delays enabled me to postpone my departure till the day after McTurk's return, and on

the 16th September 1945, I boarded a RAF transport plane with my servant Tun Che and such kit as I was permitted to take, and said farewell to North Arakan.