

was absolutely essential that efficient handlers be trained to keep the columns moving. The veterinarians of the Special Force played an important role in this regard, providing good training and advice. Colonel Hunter was able to obtain enough Galahad volunteers with previous experience with mules or horses to take care of the 700 pack animals in the 5307th. Each Special Force brigade also utilized up to 1,000 mules.

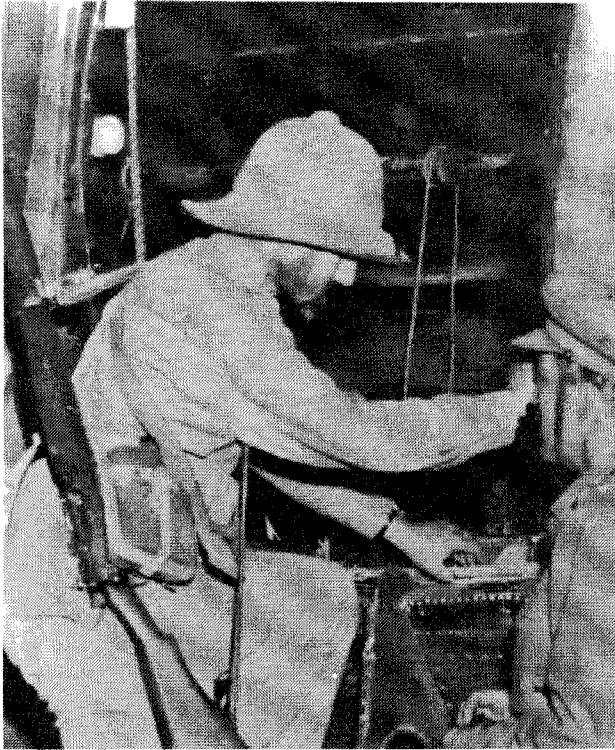
Special attention was given to the very difficult training of the animals and their handlers for river crossings. Problems in this area, if not solved promptly, could hold a jungle column up for hours on a river bank. During the course of the operation, the men grew to love many of their animals, and they cared for and protected them just as if they were fellow soldiers. Incidentally, the Special Force debrayed their pack animals for security. Hunter, however, refused to debray Galahad's animals, stating that braying was one of the few pleasures a jackass enjoyed. He later claimed that to his knowledge their brays never posed a noise problem. Apparently, the mules were just too tired to bray.²⁰

Training periods ended with lengthy field-training exercises under near-combat conditions. Wingate further stamped his influence here, frequently delivering scathing critiques to commanders and units that did not measure up to his exacting standards. Galahad participated with the Special Force in one of these ten-day exercises and held its own.

As a final training preparation before going into battle, Hunter hiked Galahad over 140 miles from their last assembly area to their jump-off site beyond Ledo. He claimed that this decision, despite its unpopularity, accomplished a number of goals. It completed the conditioning of the men and animals (who had lately undergone a soft three weeks of travel time by train). Next, it allowed the muleteers and their animals to adjust to each other on the trail. Furthermore, it "sweat in" the pack saddles to the animal's backs. And finally, it eliminated unfit men from the ranks. Hunter stated that, "More than any other single part of Galahad's training, the hike down the Ledo Road, in my professional judgment, paid the highest dividends."²¹ Having completed this arduous hike with full loads, marching primarily at night over mountainous terrain, the men of Galahad lacked no confidence in their ability to meet the physical demands of the coming operation.

Operational Concept and Methods

The plans of Stilwell and Wingate basically were good plans based on a unique operational concept that originated more or less in Wingate's fertile mind. The fundamental revolutionary concept behind the Chindit style was Wingate's proven idea that a large, specifically trained, nonindigenous force could operate indefinitely in the enemy's rear. Wingate implemented this concept by using new technology to the fullest extent possible. Using the cargo aircraft as supply trucks, the radios as telephones, and P-51 fighter-bombers as direct-support artillery, Wingate was able to deploy, sustain, direct, and support the Chindits at a far greater depth than had appeared possible. The Chindits, in this sense, may be viewed as a prototype for later airmobile forces.



General Wingate on an inspection trip

Another fundamental feature of the Chindit style was its reversed system of values regarding terrain. Previously, Allied armies had considered the jungle to be their enemy. One of the feared traits of the Japanese was their ability to operate so well in the jungle. To the Chindits, however, the jungle was a refuge:

Trails, which you had always thought of as friendly, were here the enemies, while the nighttime forest, almost the symbol of childhood terror, now meant blessed safety. You had only to lie quietly in the darkness of the forest and you were back in the invulnerable refuge of childhood's bed. No one could reach you without betraying himself with every step as he foundered among the myriad noise traps of leaves and branches.²²

Furthermore, terrain that the Japanese believed to be impassable formed secret avenues of approach for the Chindits, who demonstrated an unparalleled capability for tactical and operational maneuver.

Operational-level maneuver characterized both the deployment and the subsequent operations of the Chindits. The secret, 450-mile-long march by the 16th Brigade over terrible terrain to the close approaches of Indaw is a prime example. Unfortunately, in this instance, the brigade forfeited its surprise and ability to concentrate by conducting a premature attack without adequate reconnaissance. Thus, it failed to secure its objectives in the Indaw area because a flawed tactical operation offset a brilliant operational maneuver.

The assault by Galahad in taking the Myitkyina airfield is another example of operational-level maneuver. Already exhausted and decimated from having marched and fought through 500 miles of forbidding terrain, the

5307th, after eleven weeks of close, deadly encounters and constant stress, was approaching the end of its effectiveness when Stilwell ordered it to move 65 more miles through the jungle to attack Myitkyina from the north.²³ The line of march crossed the forbidding 6,000- to 8,000-foot-high Kumon Range. So formidable was this obstacle that the Japanese had not bothered to outpost it. Nonetheless, in an incredible feat of endurance and sheer perseverance, Galahad appeared undetected on the outskirts of Myitkyina after eighteen days. The nature of the march is described vividly by Charlton Ogburn:

We set off with that what-the-hell-did-you-expect-anyway spirit that served the 5307th in place of morale, and I dare say served it better. Mere morale would never have carried us through the country we now had to cross. We had fought with mountains before, but none like those of the Kumon Ranges under the monsoon rains. . . .

We were scarcely ever dry. When the rain stopped and the sun came out, evaporation would begin. The land steamed. The combination of heat and moisture was smothering. You had to fight through it. For those most weakened by disease, it was too much. For the first time you began to pass men fallen out beside the train, men who were not just complying with the demands of dysentery—we were used to that—but were sitting bent over their weapons, waiting for enough strength to return to take them another mile. During the worst times heretofore we could always count on one thing to keep us going—and that was the process of keeping going itself. As long as the column was on the march, men somehow seemed to be able to keep up, and it was only when we laid up for a day that the sufferers would collapse. But it did not work any longer. We had stragglers. Whenever we bivouacked, men who had been incapable of keeping up with the column, slowly as it moved, and were too tired to worry about the danger from any Japanese there might be lurking about, would be plodding in for hours afterward, unsmiling and clammy with sweat. There was a feeling in the organization that it was coming apart. And Myitkyina was still 60 miles away.²⁴

After a quick reconnaissance and a short rest period, Hunter captured the airfield in a quick daylight attack that caught the Japanese completely off guard. At the conclusion of this short battle, with the airfield in Allied hands, Hunter had only 1,310 Galahad soldiers left of 2,200 that had started the trek. Almost all of the casualties were of the nonbattle variety: injury, disease, and exhaustion. Virtually every soldier had a fever of some kind and was plagued with oozing sores or dysentery. Despite these terrible losses, the capture of the airfield was a stunning success, thanks to the maneuver that only the Chindits could have performed, coupled with a prompt, effective tactical attack.

The secret airborne deployments of the 111th and 77th Brigades into Chowringhee and Broadway also constituted operational-level maneuver. In just six days, from 5–10 March, Wingate inserted 9,000 men and 1,100 animals secretly into the enemy rear. The deployment also served a deceptive purpose by confusing the Japanese regarding the size and intent of the forces operating in their rear.

The establishment of large, permanent blocks on the Japanese main supply routes was a new concept for Chindit II made possible by the seven-fold increase in forces given to Wingate. The blocks themselves were the responsibility of specific brigades. Two blocks were established: one block, called White City, near Mawlu by the 77th Brigade and the other block, called



Allied casualties at Myitkyina airfield

Blackpool, which was placed farther north in the Railway valley near Hopin by the 111th Brigade. In each case, the block was established by two or more battalions that occupied static defensive positions that were well-fortified and dug-in. The battalions received additional supporting weapons by air. Outside the block, a mobile "floater" column or columns patrolled to be ready to attack any enemy from the rear or flank that tried to clear the block. These floater columns maintained radio contact with the block and were relieved periodically to keep them fresh. Floater columns, however, did not always work out well; sometimes they lacked the necessary punch to take on a strong, alert enemy force.

Similar to the block in organization, but serving a different purpose, was the stronghold. The idea of the stronghold was another key element in Wingate's operational concept for Chindit II. Its basic purposes were to serve as a fortified base, a port of entry for reinforcements, a shelter for recuperating columns, and a collection point for casualties. These strongholds, islands in a sea of jungle, are described in Wingate's training note:

The Stronghold is a machan overlooking a kid tied up to entice the Japanese tiger.

The Stronghold is an asylum for L.R.P.G. wounded.

The Stronghold is a magazine of stores.

The Stronghold is a defended airstrip.

The Stronghold is an administrative centre for loyal inhabitants.

The Stronghold is an orbit round which columns of the brigade circulate. It is suitably placed with reference to the main objective of the brigade.

The Stronghold is a base for light planes operating with columns on the main objective.

We wish, therefore, firstly to encounter the enemy in the open and preferably in ambushes laid by us, and secondly to induce him to attack us only in our defended Strongholds. Further, to make sure of our advantage, and in view of the fact that the enemy will be in superior force in our neighbourhood we shall choose for our Strongholds, areas inaccessible to wheeled transport. For convenience sake such Strongholds should clearly be used to cover (but not to include) an airstrip. The ideal situation for a Stronghold is the centre of a circle of thirty miles radius consisting of closely wooded and very broken country, only passable to pack transport owing to great natural obstacles, and capable only of slow improvement. This centre should ideally consist of a level upland with a cleared strip for Dakotas, a separate supply-dropping area, taxiways to the Stronghold, a neighbouring friendly village or two, and an inexhaustible and uncontaminatable water supply within the Stronghold.

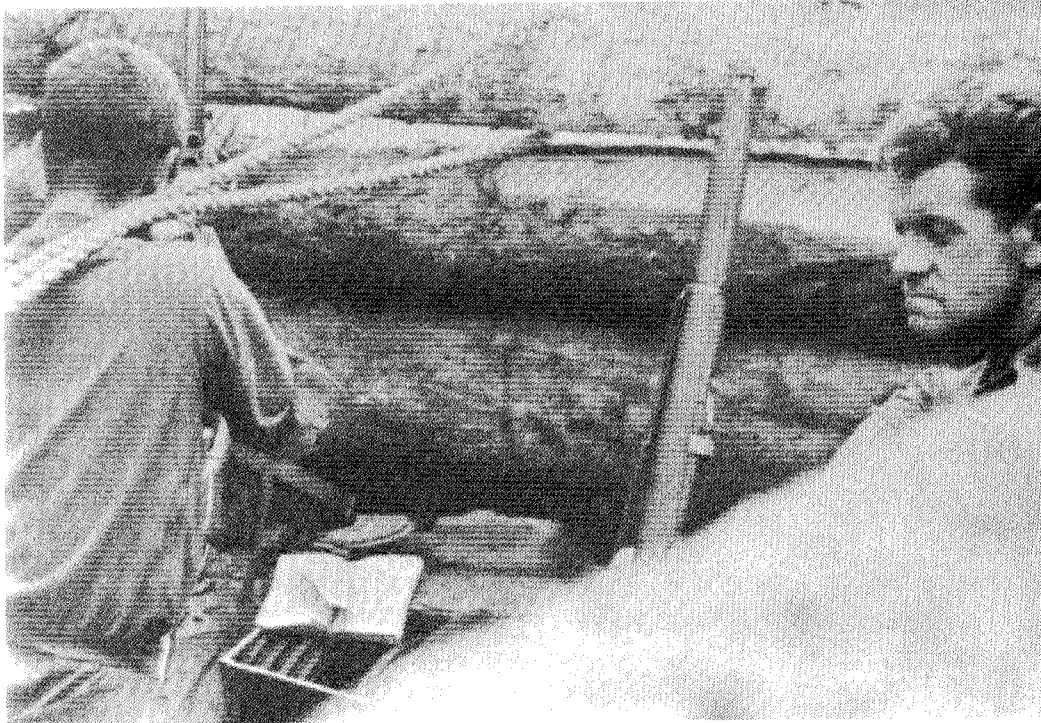
The motto of the Stronghold is "No Surrender."²⁵

The two strongholds established by the Chindits were at Broadway and Aberdeen. Broadway attracted a large Japanese force on itself, a force it defeated while remaining fully in operation. Aberdeen was never attacked by an enemy ground force. Although there were problems with both sites—primarily their inaccessibility—the concept of the stronghold turned out to be feasible and useful in practice. Interestingly, the White City block served some of the same functions as the remote strongholds in that fresh reinforcements were delivered directly to White City and many casualties flown out.

Chindit Tactics

Clearly, the implementation of the operational concept of the Chindits required them to display unusual, specialized light infantry tactics. As the primary author of Chindit tactics, Wingate deserves much credit, although the contributions of Calvert, Fergusson, and others—including the influence of the Japanese themselves—should not be overlooked. The long-range penetration tactics used during Chindit I were essentially evasive. Success depended on the superior tactical mobility of the Chindits and on high levels of jungle craft. During the first expedition, the Chindits were a well-armed, cohesive, hit-and-run force. Emerging from the jungle, they struck a poorly defended target, destroyed it, and then faded away into the jungle, drawing the enemy after them in fruitless efforts at retaliation. Over an extended period of time, the Chindits conducted continuous raiding, always striking the enemy by surprise where he was weakest and then slipping into the safety of jungle sanctuaries. Although their operations were guerrilla-like, the Chindits did not practice guerrilla warfare in the classic sense. Unlike guerillas, the Chindits were better armed, and they hit the Japanese with a harder punch and with higher frequency than would guerillas. In addition, the Chindits were sustained primarily by airdrops of supplies, not from indigenous sources. Also, Chindit operations, although decentralized, submitted to directions from a Special Force headquarters; thus, their operations lacked the haphazard nature of most guerrilla operations.

Some of the Chindit elements continued to act in the classic long-range penetration group (LRPG) style in 1944. Perhaps the best example was the Morris Force, which operated against Japanese lines of communication situated along the Bhamo-Myitkyina road. Because the Morris Force was too



Action at Broadway

weak to establish a permanent block, it had to perform a harassing, interdictory role instead. The mountains just to the east of the main supply route (MSR) provided an excellent refuge for these marauding columns. The effectiveness of the operations of the Morris Force and the Dah Force (another small British element led by Colonel Herring that used Kachin tribesmen for raiding in the same area) is described clearly by Brigadier Shelford Bidwell:

The three Gurkha columns (of the Morris Force) between them . . . had demolished eight large bridges, including two iron ones, two ferry installations and numerous small bridges, and had blown a long section of the road from a cliff face into the gorge below. The Gurkhas had come down from their mountain fastnesses to hit the road in six different places, and the two forces between them, by means of patrols, ambushes and attacks on the road engineers, prevented the repair of the breaks. Supplies to Myitkyina were never completely cut off, but they were substantially reduced. Units the Japanese could ill spare were deflected to guarding the road and chasing Kachins (the Dah Force) and Gurkhas back into the jungle; all supply convoys were liable to ambush and the movement of all but large bodies of troops made hazardous. For a battalion and a half (the Morris Force) and Herring's little mission (the Dah Force) it was a handsome dividend, and a vindication of Wingate's purer, earlier doctrine.²⁶

Initially, the 111th Brigade, before it was ordered north to establish the Black-pool block at Hopin, also pursued the same kind of tactics in its target area northwest of Indaw and with similar excellent results.²⁷



U.S. Army Signal Corps

Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell awarding medals at Myitkyina. Colonel Charles N. Hunter, second from left, had to borrow a shirt to complete the ceremony.

However, Wingate's ideas for the employment of the Special Force during Operation Thursday changed considerably from 1943 to 1944. With a much stronger force at his disposal, Wingate chose to modify LRPG tactics. Operations by the columns assumed a more direct, more aggressive character. Through the concepts of the block and the stronghold, Wingate elected to practice more or less conventional attacks and set-piece defensive battles, while the floater columns practiced the pure LRPG style. Implementing the new idea demanded that the Chindits switch from being guerrilla fighters to conventional warriors from one week to the next. The training for Chindit II reflected this concept to some degree. Calvert, understanding Wingate's new doctrine better than anyone else, clearly describes the new tactics:

The main principle on which the Long Range Penetration (L.R.P.) Brigade was based was above all versatility. Versatility of manoeuvre due to air supply and air casualty clearance. Versatility of power in that such a brigade could penetrate through every type of country in eight columns of about 400 men each, like the fingers of one's hand, and then concentrate in bringing the fingers together to clutch at the throat of the enemy when his attention had been duly scattered, or so strike a blow with a clenched fist at an important objective. When the brigade was concentrated in battle it re-formed into a more normal brigade of three or four battalions reinforced by artillery, heavy mortars, hospitals, engineer stores, etc., brought in by air. This turned it from a series of marauding columns into a homogeneous, co-ordinated brigade. Above all we placed our reliance on air.²⁸

Not everyone else, however, was comfortable with the obvious conflict between evasive, hit-and-run LRPG tactics and that of the stand-up fights required when holding a block or assaulting a strong position. Brigadier Fergusson, for instance, still favored the old Chindit style, even when directed onto a substantial target. In the attack against the enemy at Indaw,

Fergusson's plan, "using widely dispersed columns coming in on the objective from different directions, had a strong Chindit and guerrilla flavor."²⁹

In his study of the Chindit War, Brigadier Bidwell concluded:

"There is a marked contrast between the operations of Calvert's brigade and Fergusson's. The difference was not of skill, but of style. . . . Calvert had veered more and more toward the conventional. He closely controlled his columns, had trained them to dig and fortify positions and was fully prepared to assault the Japanese, controlling his vital air support through his brigade Royal Air Force officer. The 16th Brigade represented an earlier phase in the evolution of Wingate's tactics. Fergusson commanded loosely, leaving the details to his widely dispersed column commanders."³⁰

Tactical Movement

Regardless of whether the ultimate objectives were fleeting targets or ground to be secured and held, all the Chindit brigades used the same method of tactical movement in the jungle. As previously mentioned, the column formed the basic tactical element. Generally, the Special Force column consisted of a strong infantry company of four platoons, an engineer-commando platoon skilled in booby traps and demolitions, a heavy weapons platoon (two medium machine guns and two three-inch mortars), a reconnaissance platoon (mostly Burma Rifles), an animal transport platoon, and the headquarters platoon, which included an RAF detachment, intelligence section, signal element, and medical detachment. The combat teams of Galahad were almost identical in form except that they were a little stronger. Each combat team was based on one and one-half rifle companies. The heavy weapons platoon included three or four heavy machine guns, four or six 60-mm mortars, and three or four 81-mm mortars.³¹ Each Chindit battalion was divided into two columns commanded by the battalion commander or his second-in-command/executive officer. Apparently, company operations and normal company command were not typical features of Chindit warfare.

When on the march, the Chindits moved fast. Galahad particularly was noted as being extremely fast at covering ground in the jungle. While moving, the reconnaissance platoons always preceded the main body, sometimes by as much as several miles. Trail column formations most often had a rifle platoon as the first element in the main body, followed by a rifle company with half of the heavy weapons platoon. Column headquarters, transport, and the medical detachment formed the middle of the formation, with another rifle platoon and the rest of the heavy weapons in the rear.³² Some columns strictly separated the combat elements from the support elements so that there would be no delay in the tactical deployment of the column's combat power.

The column usually traveled, on and off trails, in a long, single file. When several columns moved together, the entire formation could stretch a long distance. While the accompanying mules slowed the columns, they were absolutely essential. Depending on the terrain, a day's march might vary anywhere from a couple of miles to fifteen miles. During most of the marches, soldiers suffered mind-numbing exhaustion, which forced them to concentrate all their energies on the need to keep moving. Often, the mountainous trails were negotiated on all fours. When the mules were unable to climb, their

burdens were unloaded and man packed to the top of grades.³³ As the units suffered losses, particularly of animals, agonizing decisions had to be made about what to carry on and what to leave behind. To maintain the pace, men had to have extreme levels of physical endurance and discipline. One ex-Chindit noted that during his three-month campaign, his column was always exhausted before battles.³⁴ The men of the 2d Battalion of Galahad were so exhausted after making a forced march into a defensive perimeter at Nphum Ga that some of them actually slept during the ensuing enemy barrage and ground attack.³⁵

In addition to the security provided by the reconnaissance platoons, columns often used smaller elements on connecting trails, either to provide early warning or to block an enemy infiltration or patrol. To avoid detection, Galahad worked down river valleys. During the movement to Nphum Ga, one of its combat teams crossed a river forty times in one day.³⁶

An unexpected contact on the march, which often consisted of a Japanese trail block or ambush, prompted immediate action. In response to Japanese fire, the point squad of the leading rifle platoon immediately took to ground and established a base of fire. The following two squads moved off the trail to the left and right and worked through the jungle to attack the flank or rear of the enemy position. Once the Japanese felt this flank pressure, they normally abandoned their block only to set it up again farther down the trail. These tactics reduced casualties but took a lot of time. If the Japanese position was particularly strong, the Chindit commander called up his heavy weapons to blast the enemy, while stronger elements moved off the trail to clear the block.

When attempting to hold off the advance of a Japanese unit, the Chindits used Japanese tactics in reverse. In one case, two U.S. platoons (90 men) held off a Japanese force of 850, while the main bodies of 2 battalions cleared a trail to their rear. Withdrawing through successive trail blocks, established by each platoon in turn, these Galahads inflicted sixty enemy casualties without suffering a single loss of their own.³⁷ Machine guns, sited for mutual support, formed the basis of these stiff trail blocks.

The Attack and Defense

The typical Chindit attack involved a tactical march off the trail to the near approaches of the objective. Then, a quick, professional reconnaissance by the assault elements collected critical information regarding the enemy's strength, disposition, and level of alertness. Finally, undetected, the Chindits crept as closely as possible to a flank or the rear of the enemy positions. Having achieved surprise, the Chindits then attacked with a high volume of fire from two or more directions while being supported by well-sited machine guns and mortars. The shock effect of such an attack usually was sufficient to drive off the defenders, even if the attackers were outnumbered. The key element of such an attack was the use of surprise, envelopment tactics, well-aimed and well-disciplined fire, and shock.³⁸ Shock was enhanced because up to 90 percent of the Chindit columns were actual fighters.³⁹ If ground was to be held, either permanently or temporarily, the Chindits immediately went



Major, later to be Brigadier, Bernard Fergusson

over to a stiff defense to fight off the inevitable Japanese counterattacks. Most Chindit attacks were mounted in the daytime; nighttime attacks occurred infrequently.

Japanese counterattacks often took hours in coming, but when they came, they were ferocious and unrelenting. Galahad and the Special Force learned to dig-in deeply and rapidly. Overhead cover was particularly important, because the Japanese could often bring up artillery and even tanks—two weapon systems the Chindits did not have. The Chindits quickly stockpiled their machine gun and mortar ammunition for ready access. Heavy weapons were also dug in or revetted. Animals normally were moved to the center of the perimeter and were also revetted. The men also dug trenches for wounded personnel and established a medical treatment area in a protected position. Commanders always took care to ensure that the defensive position included an uncontaminated water source. In addition, paths were tramped out to listening-observation posts to reduce noise and to make night movement easier.

When the Japanese were heard assembling for an attack, the Chindits prepared their assembly areas with mortars. To support the Chindits, P-51 Mustangs of the No. 1 Air Commando attacked the Japanese at least twice a day depending on the weather, fulfilling the role of Chindit artillery. The Chindits learned to trust these airborne gunners implicitly. (The Royal Air Force and U.S. Army Air Forces detachments used procedures to contact the Chindits and to mark targets that are still applicable today.)⁴⁰

American Nisei also enhanced the defense. Listening carefully to orders from enemy officers, the Nisei translated them in time for the defense to react. At Walawbum, a Nisei tapped directly into a Japanese wire line. The Niseis also confused the Japanese by shouting contradictory orders to induce them to charge. The Niseis were so valuable that Stilwell offered one to the British so that his talents could be used at White City.

Above all else, however, marksmanship and fire discipline were the keys to Chindit defense, particularly for Galahad. The accurate fire of the American marksmen always took a heavy toll of the Japanese, who were poor shots with individual weapons. Repeatedly, well-placed rifleman picked off Japanese while they moved carelessly forward. So confident were the Galahads in their fire that they routinely let the Japanese approach to grenade-throwing distance before unleashing, on signal, a devastating volume of fire that mowed down the charging enemy in rows. Colonel Hunter (and others) stated unequivocally that superior American marksmanship was the single most important feature in Galahad's campaign.⁴¹ Conservation of fire was also important, for the Chindits were usually surrounded by the Japanese and had to depend on airdrops for resupply of ammunition. Thus, the Chindits were careful not to let their stocks dwindle, especially the mortar and machine-gun ammunition. British and Americans alike have stated in their memoirs that the machine guns and mortars played an absolutely essential role in Chindit defensive operations.

In the course of its operations, Galahad normally was relieved from its defensive roles by the arrival of Chinese regiments.⁴² The British, however, established permanent blocks at White City and Blackpool and at the strongholds of Broadway and Aberdeen. These positions, naturally more fixed in nature, encompassed airstrips within their defensive schemes and included, in the case of Broadway, a temporary fighter-bomber element on station. The Chindits strengthened these positions with wire and booby traps, constructed communications trenches and thick overhead cover, brought in more firepower in the form of antiaircraft, antitank, and artillery weapons, and replenished the troop garrison.

The most unique feature of the defense of the permanent sites, however, was the integrated use of floater columns and "jitter" patrols. Calvert, in particular, used these mobile elements outside the wire to ambush the Japanese, striking them in the rear. The Japanese proved very vulnerable to attacks by unknown forces against their rear, such assaults often causing them to call off their own attacks. In this way, the defenders were able to retain the initiative until the Japanese moved in vastly superior forces.

In the long run, the Chindits were ill suited to conduct or to withstand a long siege. At the end of a more than 200-mile-long air line of communication, they simply did not have the combined arms combat power for these tasks. In addition, no replacements existed to replace Chindit casualties. Nevertheless, their efforts tied up large numbers of Japanese forces and caused huge Japanese losses. In Galahad's first defensive block at Walawbum, it is estimated that the Japanese lost 800 men to Galahad's 45 killed and wounded in action.⁴³ Eight battalions of Japanese broke against the reefs of the White City Brigade, and an entire Japanese regiment was decimated at Blackpool

before the 111th was forced to abandon its block.⁴⁴ Initially shocked, then infuriated by the stubborn defenses they encountered, the Japanese soon became demoralized by their losses. Had they been more patient and employed heavier forces, particularly artillery, the Chindit blocks could have been cleared away with fewer losses. However, engaged as they were in the decisive battle of Imphal-Kohima, the Japanese were loath to divert their best units and their scarce equipment to clear the blocks.

Kachin Support

The final notable feature of Chindit tactics was their reliance on support from the North Kachin levies. Raised initially by the British, led by Special Operations Executive (SOE) and OSS officers, and aided by the ever-ministering C-47s, the Kachins initially conducted their own guerrilla war of spying and sabotage against the Japanese—often with spectacular results.⁴⁵ In 1944, however, their operations were consciously coordinated with those of the Chindits.

The Kachins were incredibly light, being armed with a variety of new and ancient weapons, but they carried little ammunition. They avoided casualties by using hit-and-run tactics and by choosing the time and place of contact. The Kachins were also jungle masters with a near telepathic ability to regroup after dispersal. Noiseless, adept at night, brave, heroic, and possessed of a fierce fighting character, one writer described them as the greatest fighting men in the world.⁴⁶ Every British and American commander who enjoyed their support praised their remarkable fighting ability and jungle craft.

A squadron of Kachin Rangers preparing for inspection

Romanus and Sunderland. Stilwell's Command Problems. OCMH



Kachin support to the Chindits took several forms. In the main, the Kachins furnished intelligence, acted as guides, screened Chindit movements, and provided trail security. In a few instances, they reinforced the Chindit columns. The Chindits also borrowed Kachin elephants to carry supplies and clear drop zones. The Kachins even built footbridges across rivers and improved trails to assist the progress of the columns. The 5307th used their special skills more than the Special Force, because the 5307th operated in the northern areas where the Kachins were most numerous. After the fall of Myitkyina, Hunter remarked in a cable to the commander of OSS Detachment 101, that the 5307th could not have succeeded in its tasks without the help of the Kachins.⁴⁷ In short, these brave, loyal, primitive tribesmen proved to be indispensable to the Chindits. They represent an excellent example of light infantry forces making use of indigenous resources and cooperating with local irregulars.

Logistics

Chindit logistics depended entirely on two means: airplanes, to deliver supplies deep in enemy territory; and mules and horses, to haul them once they were received. Everything the Chindits needed came by air. Without the services of the No. 1 Air Commando and the 2d Troop Carrier Command (which supplied the 5307th), no Chindit expedition would have been possible. The concept of long-range penetration was tied directly to air supply. Chindit I had proven that air supply was feasible; Chindit II stretched the concept to its limits and gave new meaning to the scale of deep penetration.

Ingenuity, innovation, and energy formed the basis for the Chindit air lifeline. Air operations required good, reliable communications; expert liaison; fast responses to Chindit requests; well-executed SOPs; fighter protection; and bold, skilled pilots. Teamwork and mutual trust were central to the achievement of success. Ground and air elements understood each other, and few misunderstandings existed. Some of the highest praise expressed by Chindit commanders concerned the heroic efforts of their air support.

The Chindits called for air resupply approximately every four to five days. This low frequency of resupply and the short duration of loiter time by air units over the drop zones greatly contributed to the maintenance of secrecy regarding Chindit locations. The ground elements normally transmitted their specific requests the day or night before the drop was made. Supply personnel in the rear packaged the material in such ways that some of it could free-fall to ground on a low-altitude pass, and the rest could descend by parachute.⁴⁸ All containers were configured to conform as much as possible to packboard loads, with little necessary resorting. Most supplies fell into common categories—food, ammunition, medicine, clothing, grain, and engineer stores. When requested, however, the materials delivered could be unique and personal:

There was also a "personal service," which periodically dropped to individuals items they had stored with the supply officer before leaving, and which handled special requests as they arose. The R.A.F. made a valiant attempt to give the Chindits anything they asked for. Among the "personal service" items that traveled the aerial supply route were monocles, a kilt, false teeth, spectacles, pipe tobacco, boxes of snuff, small food luxuries, new books, notice to one man of an 11,000 rupee legacy, and one officer's last will and testament. Every

Chindit who had false teeth or wore glasses had left a plate impression or an eyeglass prescription on file at the air base. At every dropping, Wingate's men received mail from home, newspapers and magazines.⁴⁹

Those who selected routes during tactical movement considered the proximity of good drop zones (which the jungle provided in good measure) and landing zones for heavy equipment. Landing zones were natural clearings, rice paddies, sand bars—even the surface of Lake Indawgi for pontoon-equipped aircraft. Occasionally, the Chindits had to chop drop zones out of the jungle, but this often could be done quickly, particularly when Kachin elephants were on hand to help. Supplies received at drop zones were promptly loaded and moved away from the area, distribution normally being made once the column had reached a secure position.

The support base also demonstrated that it could be very responsive when necessary. Although the average time between request and delivery ranged from twelve to eighteen hours, the shortest time for a supply mission to reach Galahad was a mere two hours and twenty-two minutes after the message had been received.⁵⁰ The Galahad support base monitored the operation's radio net in order to keep track of the unit's whereabouts and needs. This practice eliminated the need for retransmission of messages. In addition, some trucks and aircraft were preloaded, thus ready to dash to the airfield as soon as a supply request was received.

Most of the supplies for the permanent Special Force positions, including all the heavy gear, was airlanded. Accordingly, the airstrips within the blocks and strongholds had all been made usable for C-47s by airfield engineers. When these airstrips became unusable by reason of Japanese interdiction, cargo aircraft delivered their loads directly to the defensive positions by parachute. This practice, in fact, gave White City its name, the trees in the perimeter having been covered with white parachutes from supply drops. (Incidentally, the parachute silk made good trading material to local villagers in return for fresh food.)

One of the most important features of the air lifeline was medical evacuation. During Chindit I, no allowances had been made to evacuate casualties. Thus, a serious wound or injury usually meant the death or capture of the victim. During Chindit II, however, casualties were evacuated on the L-4 and L-5 light planes, often within mere hours of the wounds. The American pilots of these planes proved their ability and willingness to land almost anywhere to pick up Chindit casualties, which created a strong bond of admiration and affection between the ground and air forces. The knowledge that this capability existed had an immeasurably positive effect on Chindit spirits. Air evacuation probably had more influence on the maintenance of good morale than any other facet of the organization.

The significance of the air support to the Chindits cannot be overemphasized. No other means of supply could have sustained the force. Moreover, every time that the Chindits found themselves in a tight spot—such as at Nphum Ga and at White City—airdrops kept them in the fight. On the other hand, when Japanese fire closed the Blackpool airstrip, restricting resupply to airdrop alone, the 111th Brigade was forced to abandon its block, partly because it could not be sustained in place. This failure demonstrated the absolute necessity of the air lifeline.