

Stout Pilots and Aircraft

Air Transport in the 1944 Burma–India Campaigns

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American-born lieutenant Scott Gilmore, serving with the 8th Gurkha Rifles in the February 1944 siege known as the Battle of the Admin Box, reflected on the reasons the besieged forces defeated the Japanese. “Air supply had been the foundation for success, as it was to be for the rest of the war in this theater,” he wrote. “That trusty warhorse of the Burma fighting, the C-47 Dakota, has been called the ‘new wonder weapon’ of those times. So it was. We infantry came to feel great affection for it.”¹

This battle was one of a series of clashes along the 500-mile India–Burma border during the first eight months of 1944. While US Lt Gen Joseph W. Stilwell’s Chinese and American forces fought their way from India to Myitkyina, Burma, British Maj Gen Orde Wingate’s Chindits marched and flew into Burma for a campaign against the Japanese rear, lasting from March to August. Meanwhile, Japanese armies launched two major offensives against British general William Slim’s Fourteenth Army in India. The first one came in February, resulting in defeat in the Arakan at the Battle of the Admin Box. The next month the Japanese undertook a major invasion of India that failed after months of fighting at Imphal and Kohima, India. These operations collectively involved thousands of troops maneuvering in some of the toughest terrain in the world, in an area the size of Pennsylvania.²

In regions where surface communications are limited or problematic, air transport becomes the essential lifeline. The experiences of the US Army Air Force (USAAF) and British Royal Air Force (RAF) air transporters in Southeast Asia in 1944 demonstrate how air transport can sustain and facilitate ground operations. The fliers’ diverse experiences offer three basic types of case studies: the Admin Box and the Imphal Airlift (sustainment for a surrounded force), the Chindits and reinforcements for Imphal and Kohima (strategic mobility), and North Burma (facilitating and sustaining tactical ground operations).

Sustainment of Pockets: The Admin Box and Imphal

The Japanese Arakan offensive, code-named Ha-Go, commenced on 4 February 1944. With attacks on the front and flank of the British XV Corps’ 5th and 7th Indian Divisions. On the morning of 6 February, Japanese forces overran 7th Indian Division’s headquarters, forcing its survivors back to the supply area, where

they formed a hedgehog position, or *Box*, ever after known as the Admin Box. Other divisional units also assumed all-around defense. Slim issued orders to hold in place and sent reinforcements to relieve the surrounded troops.

Slim also summoned Brig Arthur “Alf” Snelling, Fourteenth Army’s supply officer, and ordered him to start supplying 7th Indian Division by air. Snelling’s staff, aided by their comrades in the RAF and USAAF, had already assembled supplies and planned an airlift down to individual planeloads. Ground crew also improvised parachutes out of jute material to solve a shortage of actual parachutes. “The switchover [to air supply], as far as I was concerned,” said Slim, “was simple, thanks to the preparation that Fourteenth Army, Third Tactical Air Force, and Troop Carrier Command together had made – it required only the word, ‘Go!’.”³

The first groups of C-47s appeared over the Admin Box on 11 February. This was the second lift attempt, the first having been turned back by Japanese fighters. This time Troop Carrier Command’s leader, US Brig Gen William D. Old, personally piloted the lead plane. He bored in on the drop zone through Japanese ground fire at an altitude of 250 feet, with the rest of the transports following. Parachutes erupted from the rear of each transport as the supplies were pushed out the door. The planes circled and made repeated runs to make sure all supplies were dropped. Separate lifts brought supplies to the other brigade positions. “It is difficult to describe the light-heartedness these low and slow-flying Dakotas produced among the troops,” recalled Brig M. R. Roberts, commanding one of the surrounded brigades. “Ammunition, food, medical comforts, rum, and cigarettes poured out of the sky.” Brig Geoffrey Evans, the Admin Box commander, also marveled at the supply operation. “The thoroughness of the air supply was remarkable,” he said. “Everything that was ordered was flown in, even such items as razors and toothbrushes.” Mule fodder came in, as did mail; issues of *SEAC*, the theater newspaper; fuel and oil for the tanks; and replacement clothing. Morale soared among the defenders.⁴

Above the surrounded soldiers, air battles raged as the RAF and Japanese Army Air Force planes wheeled and whirled in a battle for supremacy. The Japanese mounted a major air effort, with large fighter sweeps over the battlefield. Third Tactical Air Force countered with its Hurricanes and Spitfires, the latter new to the theater. By mid-February, more than 150 Japanese planes had been shot down, and the British owned the skies over the Arakan. On 24 February, a relief column broke through to the defenders. The Battle of the Admin Box was over—a notable Allied success on the ground and in the air.⁵

Five weeks later, on 29 March, Lt Gen Geoffrey A. Scoones’ British IV Corps was cut off at Imphal. Four divisions, plus support troops, concentrated around the town and its surrounding plain. Heavy Japanese attacks were occurring all

around the corps' perimeter, with the expectation of more to come. At the present rate of consumption, IV Corps had supply reserves for about 30 days of operations. Scoones cut rations to his men and animals by a third and ordered economy of movement to save fuel. Brig L.T. Loup, IV Corps' chief quartermaster, directed, "Continuous and energetic steps will be taken to ensure maximum economy."⁶

It was clear that IV Corps could only survive on air supply. The Imphal Plain boasted six airfields, four fair-weather with dirt runways and two all-weather with paved runways. The first planes landed 8 April, bringing in supplies and artillery, and taking out wounded. Scoones flew out noncombat units on outbound aircraft to reduce his ration strength and get them out of the way.⁷

Loup provided to Fourteenth Army a weekly list of "demands" for supplies and transport priorities and would continue until the siege was lifted. His first one, delivered 11 April, quietly laid the situation on the line. "It is not at present known what tonnage can be expected by air daily or whether it is possible to give any indication as to whether a regular allotment of so many sorties a day can be made to 4 Corps," Loup wrote. "Equally, it is realized that weather and/or other operational commitments make it difficult to forecast any definite daily allotment. It is, however, suggested that an attempt be made . . . as it is most important from every point of view that units and formations [of IV Corps] be kept up to strength." He then outlined IV Corps' key needs in order of priority—personnel to replace losses, arms, ammunition, equipment to fortify defensive positions, food, other supplies, and stationery. "May early information be sent as to approximately what rate of sorties may be expected?" he asked.⁸

On 17 April, in response to Loup's message, the staffs of Fourteenth Army, Third Tactical Air Force, and Troop Carrier Command met at Comilla, India (today Bangladesh) to plan a long-term airlift into Imphal. IV Corps' 155,000 men and 11,000 animals needed 540 tons per day to sustain the unit in fighting condition through the end of June. The conferees decided to start an organized lift from the Bengal airfields into Imphal under the codename Operation Stamina. They assembled an Anglo-American force of 232 C-47s to execute the operation.⁹

Operation Stamina started 18 April with 75 flights into Imphal—a significant jump over the previous high of 46 on 11 April. The next day, more than 100 planes landed for the first time, and landings ranged between 106 on 19 April and 166 on 23 April. On 28 April, only 87 planes arrived. The cargoes included requested supplies, personnel, mail, and stationery. Bithess, a geosynthetic paving material, also came in and was immediately put down on some of the dirt airfields to help them drain during the coming monsoon.¹⁰

Even so, it was not enough. The airlift delivered 1,250 tons less than needed in its first 12 days. Some planes arrived empty, while others had problems navigating

weather and clouds over the mountain ranges between Bengal and Imphal. Slow loading and unloading processes hampered performance, while careless truck drivers sometimes damaged planes in collisions. Lack of paved hardstands also caused congestion on flight lines at Imphal's airfields. To simplify loading, many of Bengal's airfields became single-commodity loading points, while all fields in Imphal were used for deliveries. On the plus side, the Allied air supremacy over eastern India, coupled with the Japanese commitment of their aircraft elsewhere, ensured the transports could fly with little interference from Japanese planes.¹¹

On 30 April, Scoones sent Slim an appreciation of the situation at Imphal. "The initial enemy plans on all fronts have been frustrated," Scoones wrote. "The enemy is likely to continue his operation for the capture of Imphal." Scoones promised to mount the best defense he could, including counterattacks where possible. As for supply, Scoones and Loup assumed the monsoon would start on or about 21 May; when that happened, only half the daily sorties were likely to come in, as four of Imphal Plain's six airfields would be largely unusable due to mud and wet. "Against a total tonnage demand of 37,360 tons up to 31 July," Loup warned, "it will only be possible to fly in 21,995 tons, i.e. *a deficiency of 15,365 tons.*" Without land communications reopened by 15 June, "when resources will be eaten down, then about two divisions and a proportion of Corps troops must be flown out of the area." Imphal could hold for the time being, but IV Corps would start to wither for lack of sufficient supplies. After six more weeks, IV Corps would start folding.¹²

The pilots did their best, but problems continued into May. Against a daily requirement of 189 supply landings, on most days between 90 and 110 flights reached Imphal. Weather was the biggest issue: on 22 May it kept all but 14 flights away, and on 27 May all but 11. The rains also limited use of airfields outside Imphal Main and Palel after mid-May, resulting in even greater congestion. The threats of Japanese infiltration and long-range shelling from the nearby front lines further restricted the use of Palel.¹³

RAF 221 Group, with its Spitfires, Vengeances, and Hurricanes based in Imphal, managed to maintain air supremacy over the area, although they could not prevent all Japanese air incursions. Nonetheless, the British, Indian, and Burmese fliers took to the air as often as possible to support the ground troops and the airlift. By battle's end, the RAF had flown over 25,000 sorties and shot down 33 Japanese fighters with another 22 probable and 61 damaged, against a loss of 18 Spitfires.¹⁴

Stamina's shortfalls limited IV Corps' fighting ability. Artillery firing was limited to six rounds per day per gun, unless Corps headquarters authorized more firing. Fuel was at a premium, and trucks were often operated in tandem to save gasoline and oil. Rations were cut to a level unable to sustain active troops, and by

mid-May hunger was prevalent in many formations. “Scaling hills became a problem and patrols were given extra food,” remembered a lieutenant in 17th Indian Division. “We smoked a lot to stop thinking of hunger.” Lack of rain gear and new clothing added to the hardships. “We had the means to ensure survival, but no more,” recalled a staff officer. “Life during the siege of Imphal was strenuous for all and devoid of comfort and it imposed a strain on the nerves.”¹⁵

The situation in June did not improve. Despite the weather, an average of 259 tons per day arrived during the period 4–15 June. Rations were again cut. Most ominously, by mid-June, fuel and oil stocks for IV Corps were estimated to run dry in just more than a week. At the same time, the weather socked in Imphal and prevented many deliveries. On 20 June, IV Corps had to report that “Stocks in the RIASC [Royal Indian Army Supply Corps] depot are practically exhausted and unless petrol is received daily . . . it will be necessary to eat down the very small . . . reserves.” Fortunately, this was the lowest point. On 22 June, relieving forces from Kohima reopened land communications and raised the siege.¹⁶

Strategic Mobility: Chindit Invasion and Reinforcements for Imphal–Kohima

Allied air transport also facilitated two important strategic air movements in March 1944: Operation Thursday, the Chindit invasion of Burma, and a rapid reinforcement of Imphal and Kohima by the 5th Indian Division. Each of these represented the largest troop movements by air to that date.

General Wingate had developed and refined his concepts of long-range penetration and prepared to mount a winged invasion of Burma. His force came under Fourteenth Army and was officially designated 3rd Indian Division or Special Force—but best known by its nickname of *Chindits*. Gen Henry “Hap” Arnold, Chief of the US Army Air Forces, sent two of his best young officers, lieutenant colonels Philip Cochran and John Alison, to India with whatever air force they could find. Their 1st Air Commando departed with 30 P-51 Mustangs, 20 B-25s, 32 C-47 transports, 225 gliders, 100 L-1 and L-5 liaison aircraft, and six prototype Sikorsky helicopters. Aviation engineers of the 900th Field Unit also joined the burgeoning force.¹⁷

On 5 March, Wingate prepared to kick off Operation Thursday, the Chindits’ invasion of Burma and the largest airborne operation of World War II to date. Thursday had three objectives: “1. To help the advance of combat troops (Ledo Sector) [Stilwell’s forces] to the Myitkyina area by drawing off and disorganizing the enemy force opposing them and prevent the reinforcement of these forces. 2. To create a favorable situation for the Chinese [Y Force] advance westwards

across the Salween. 3. To inflict the maximum confusion, damage, and loss on the enemy forces in Burma.”¹⁸

One of Special Force’s six brigades (16 under Brig Bernard Fergusson) had set off on a 450-mile march from Ledo a month earlier. Now Wingate planned to fly in two brigades (77 under Brig Mike Calvert and 111 under Brig W.D.A. “Joe” Lentaigne) to join 16 Brigade near Indaw, Burma, in the Japanese rear, holding the other three brigades in reserve. The 1st Air Commando would handle air support and glider operations. Planners identified three landing zones in the jungle, all within 40 miles of Indaw and the railroad that served as the supply line for the Japanese opposing Stilwell. The zones were code-named Broadway, Piccadilly, and Chowringhee; each was large enough to house a C-47 airstrip and offered good access to Indaw.¹⁹

Wingate’s orders also envisioned a system of fixed bases for his men to use behind enemy lines. Called *strongholds*, these fortified centers would hold airstrips, supplies, and artillery. Floater units would operate nearby to ambush the Japanese and if possible draw them into the stronghold itself. “The Stronghold,” instructed Wingate, “is an orbit around which columns of the brigade circulate . . . The motto of the Stronghold is ‘No Surrender.’”²⁰

On the afternoon of 5 March, Calvert’s 77 Brigade and part of 111 Brigade stood at Lalaghat airfield, India, ready to board the 61 gliders that would take them into Burma. Slim, who the day before had briefed Stilwell on Wingate’s plans, was also present. The planes were scheduled to take off at 1800 for a night landing by the light of a near-full moon.

Suddenly at 1630 an intelligence officer appeared with new photos of the landing zones. One was blocked with logs, but the reason was unknown; the other zones were clear. Was this an ambush? Nobody was sure, and there was no time to investigate. Postponement was not an option; they had to go that night or cancel. Slim and Wingate stepped aside for a chat. “The decision is yours,” said Wingate, Thursday’s commander, to Slim.²¹

“I knew it was,” recalled Slim. “Not for the first time I felt the weight of decision crushing in on me with an almost physical pressure . . . On my answer would depend not only the possibility of a disaster with wide implications on the whole Burma campaign and beyond, but the lives of these splendid men, tense and waiting around their aircraft. At that moment I would have given a great deal if Wingate or anybody else could have relieved me of the duty of decision. But that is a burden the commander himself must bear.” After some discussion, the plan was modified so as to fly all Calvert’s men into Broadway that night. Slim signaled his assent. The planes took off at 1812.²²

The Broadway landing did not go smoothly, as Calvert soon discovered ruts in the land undetectable from the air. After a string of glider crashes, he closed the field for the night with the second wave en route. The next morning US Army engineers of the 900th Field Unit, who made it in with most of their equipment, began smoothing out the field. By nightfall Broadway was back open; Wingate himself arrived for a look in one of the 64 C-47s to land on the night of 6–7 March. Over the next week, relays of C-47s came into Broadway and Chowringhee (opened 10 March) while light aircraft flew out casualties. “In a few days,” remembered Calvert, “we had 12,000 men, 2,000 mules, masses of equipment, anti-aircraft and field guns all established behind the enemy lines.”²³

Allied air mobility also provided decisive reinforcements to Imphal and Kohima. The Japanese offensive had forced IV Corps to commit all its reserves, and General Slim activated a contingency plan to fly in troops from XV Corps. In the latter half of March, Maj Gen Harold Briggs’ 5th Indian Division started its fly-in via USAAF C-46s and C-47s. Some of Briggs’ units came off the firing line in the Arakan, moved to the airfield, packed and loaded, flew 200 miles to Imphal, unloaded, and went into action—all in the span of three days. Fortunately, Fourteenth Army logisticians had provided detailed loading tables that guided and speeded the process. Leading was Brigadier Evans’ 123rd Brigade, which flew in on 20 and 21 March, followed by General Briggs on 22 March, when weather and the need for pilot rest slowed operations, then the divisional artillery, and lastly 9th Brigade. By 26 March, 531 airplane sorties had brought in 5,924 men, 129 jeeps, 313 mules, 36 motor-carriers, and 40 guns into Imphal.²⁴

For Briggs’ men, it was quite an adventure. “It was the first and only time,” recalled a staff officer, “that a division was transported by air out of action on one battle front to immediate action on another front several hundred miles distant.” Most of the soldiers had never been on a plane before. The American pilots, the first Americans many men had ever seen, merely added to the exotic flair of the trip.²⁵

The arrival of Briggs’ troops stabilized the crisis north and northeast of Imphal. However, Slim understood another crisis was developing 60 miles to the north at Kohima and Dimapur 40 miles beyond. “Within a week of the start of the Japanese offensive,” he recalled, “it became clear that the situation in the Kohima area was likely to be even more dangerous than that at Imphal. Not only were the enemy columns closing in on Kohima at much greater speed than I had expected, but they were obviously in much greater strength.” Slim had expected a strike toward Kohima by a Japanese regiment, but a captured Japanese order confirmed an entire enemy division was on its way. “We were not prepared for so heavy a thrust,” Slim admitted. “Kohima with its rather scratch garrison and, what was worse, Dimapur with no garrison at all, were in deadly peril.” Slim diverted the

5th Indian Division's last brigade, the 161st, to Dimapur and Kohima, where it turned back the Japanese advance in an epic defensive action.²⁶

Air Transport and Tactical Ground Operations: North Burma

Simultaneously with the battles in India, General Stilwell's Chinese-American forces pushed south to open the Ledo Road corridor and captured the key city of Myitkyina. Part of the spearhead was the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), popularly known as Merrill's Marauders, which repeatedly made wide flanking movements into the Japanese rear. At the same time, General Wingate's Chindits fought to disrupt Japanese communications, later shifting northward to meet Stilwell's advance. The Chindits also established new strongholds—named White City, Aberdeen, and later Blackpool—to support their expanding operations. Both of these campaigns dispersed bands of men, usually a few thousand but sometimes no more than a few hundred in strength, over an area as large and remote as West Virginia.²⁷

In these conditions, supply and communication came to depend on air transport—the 1st Air Commando for the Chindits, and 2nd Troop Carrier and 803rd Air Evacuation Squadrons for Stilwell's troops. Light planes, usually American L-1s and L-5s operating from dirt runways cut out of jungle clearings, moved commanders and staff officers around, assisting in liaison between widely scattered leaders and units. This was especially important during fluid operations when the terrain and atmospherics sometimes rendered radio transmissions of questionable reliability and security. USAAF and RAF C-47s delivered prepackaged loads of supplies from stocked airfields in India to the men and their supporting animals, sometimes when in close contact with the Japanese and through ground fire. "Despite the fire," noted Capt H.L. Greengus of the 2nd Troop Carrier Squadron, USAAF, "the ships flew in at stalling speed, only a few hundred feet above the ground, to make sure the water and ammunition were received by our Allies instead of the Japanese. In the pattern over the dropping target, the Second Troop Carrier Squadron constantly was under machine gun fire."²⁸

The aircrews and ground forces quickly established a mutual understanding, usually through training but occasionally having the aircrews spend a few days with frontline units. "We don't give damn if the weather's bad or the Japs are raising hell," commented an American pilot, "those fellows on the ground need the stuff and we're going to get it to them regardless of consequence." Those below appreciated what the aircrews could do for them. "Please be assured," said Lt Col D.C. Herring to the Air Commando leadership, after a fatal training accident involving his Chindit command, "that we will go with your boys any place, any time, anywhere." The latter part of this statement became the 1st Air Commando motto.²⁹

One of the transporters' most important roles was casualty evacuation from the battle zone in Burma to hospitals in eastern and northeastern India. Despite ground personnel shortages, slowness of loading and unloading stretcher cases, and at times insufficient aircraft, the American aircrews strained every effort to get the wounded back to India. By campaign's end, ten percent of casualties arrived at hospitals in India the same day of their wounding; others arrived usually within 1–3 days, depending on distance from their wounding site to an airfield.³⁰

The casualty evacuation effort in Burma also made military history. On 21 April 1944, a light plane, carrying three casualties and an American pilot, went down 15 miles west of White City. Planes could not get in to rescue the men, so an overland rescue expedition started from White City. "Send the egg-beater in," commanded Cochran from 1st Air Commando headquarters. The Commandos' lone operational Sikorsky YR-4B helicopter flew to Aberdeen in stages, arriving 25 April. The helicopter pilot, Lt Carter Harmon, learned that Chindits had secured an airstrip in a riverbed not far away from the stranded men. He flew to the streambed, landed and refueled, got his bearings, and took off immediately. Harmon knew the Sikorsky would struggle to carry himself and one passenger, and that four trips would be needed. On the 25th, he picked up two casualties before the engine overheated and needed a rest. The next day he made two trips to pick up the final casualty and the pilot, taking off as troops (which turned out to be the rescue party) swarmed the landing zone. Harmon flew back to Aberdeen, having accomplished the first battlefield helicopter rescue in military history.³¹

This rapid evacuation of casualties had a major morale impact on the ground troops. "For those of us who [on a previous Chindit operation behind enemy lines] so often had the misery of abandoning our wounded . . . the powers of the light aircraft lifted a great weight from our hearts," recalled Brigadier Fergusson after the war. "The pilots were as stout as the aircraft." Later he expressed a common opinion among Chindit and Marauder veterans: "When we Chindits are old, garrulous and thundering bores," he said, "we will remember what you did for us, and tell our children . . . we shall not forget the L.P.F. [Light Plane Force], nor what its light-hearted pilots did for us in their ramshackle planes."³²

Conclusion

"A most distinctive aspect of our Burma war," wrote General Slim in 1956, "was the great use we made of air transport. It was one of our great contributions towards a new kind of warfare and I think it fair to say that, to a large extent, we discovered by trial and error the methods of air supply that later passed into general use . . . Ours was a joint land and air war; its result, as much a victory for the air forces as for the army."³³

The efforts of the air transporters did not win the 1944 India–Burma battles by themselves but did provide essential sustainment, strategic mobility, and tactical agility to the Allied ground forces. The men who flew the large transports and light planes alike assisted and enabled the ground battle to be prosecuted to victory.

Although technology has changed transporters' operating environment, the fundamentals of these case studies remain valid today. Air transport was, and still is, a system of which the flight itself is just one component; to be fully effective, transporters require reliable ground support on both departure and arrival of a shipment to ensure accurate and efficient handling. Good communication, collaboration, and coordination between air and ground forces defined requirements, smoothed out operations, and minimized misunderstandings. None of it would have been possible without air superiority or preferably air supremacy, which proved an essential and overriding requirement for success.³⁴

Even as the campaign raged, General Stilwell understood the important lessons for the United States from the 1944 India–Burma battles. "I believe the operations which are now being, and for some months have been, conducted in Northern Burma and in the Imphal area," he told General Arnold in June 1944, "constitute an exemplification of the kind of joint air and ground operations which you have in mind." His statement remains true 76 years after it was made.³⁵ ★

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Notes

1. Scott Gilmore, *A Connecticut Yankee in the 8th Gurkha Rifles* (London: Brassey's 1995), 144.
2. Excellent popular histories of the Burma operations in World War II are Louis Allen, *Burma: The Longest War* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984) and Frank McLynn, *The Burma Campaign: Disaster into Triumph 1942–45* (London: Vintage, 2011). For official accounts, see Maj Gen S. Woodburn Kirby, *The War Against Japan, Volumes I–V* (London: H.M. Stationary Office, 1957–1969; Naval & Military Press, reprint 2004); Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, DC: US Army, 1953); Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, DC: US Army, 1954); and Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Time Runs Out in CBI* (Washington, DC: US Army, 1958). All references to Kirby are to Volume III; all references to Romanus and Sunderland, unless otherwise noted, are to *Stilwell's Command Problems*.
3. William Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (London: Cassell, 1961), 236.

4. M.R. Roberts, *Golden Arrow: The Story of the 7th Indian Division* (East Sussex: Naval & Military Press, 1951), 84; and Geoffrey C. Evans, *The Desert and the Jungle* (London: Kimber, 1959), 152–53. American light planes also flew out wounded from the 114th Brigade perimeter.

5. N.N. Madan, *The Arakan Operations, 1942–45* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1954), 118–19; see also Henry Probert, *Forgotten Air Force: The Royal Air Force in the War against Japan, 1941–45* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac, 1995).

6. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, 320–25; and IV Corps Q War Diary, April 1944, UK National Archives.

7. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, 320–25; IV Corps Q War Diary, April 1944; and Antony Brett-James, *Ball of Fire: The Fifth Indian Division in the Second World War* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1951), 322.

8. This message is in IV Corps Q War Diary, April 1944. Loup reported to Fourteenth Army on 11 and 18 April that IV Corps was desperately short of paper and office supplies to conduct business.

9. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, 320–23; and Bisheshwar Prasad, *The Reconquest of Burma, Vol. I, June 1942–June 1944* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 1958, reprint 2014), 418–25.

10. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, 322–23, 512–16; see also IV Corps Q War Diary, April 1944.

11. Kirby, *The War Against Japan*, 322–23, 512–16; see also IV Corps Q War Diary, April 1944, and Joe G. Taylor, *Air Supply in the Burma Campaigns* (Maxwell AFB, AL: USAF Historical Study No. 75, 1957), 65–90.

12. This report is in Prasad, *Reconquest of Burma, Vol. I*, 418–25. Emphasis is in the original.

13. IV Corps Q War Diary, May 1944.

14. Probert, *Forgotten Air Force*, 190–93. Flight times from the Imphal Plain to the battlefield were so short that it was not unheard of for a fighter-bomber to take off on a mission, strike the target, and immediately return to base to reload and go back again.

15. IV Corps Q War Diary, May 1944; 254th Tank Brigade War Diary, June 1944, UK National Archives; M. Attiqur Rahman, *Back to the Pavilion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 49; and A.J.F. Doulton, *The Fighting Cock: Being The History of 23d Indian Division, 1942–1947* (Sussex: Naval & Military Press, 2002), 138–44.

16. IV Corps Q War Diary, June 1944.

17. Lowell Thomas, *Back to Mandalay* (New York: Greystone, 1951), passim; see also Charlton Ogburn, *The Marauders* (New York: Harper, 1959), 14–15. The 1st Air Commando was officially known as the 5318th Provisional Air Unit until 25 March 1944, which the designation *1st Air Commando* became permanent.

18. Derek Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War* (London: Futura Publications, 1972), 193–94.

19. Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War*, 194–96. The landing zones were named for the major commercial streets in London (Piccadilly), New York (Broadway), and Calcutta (Chowringhee).

20. Wingate laid out the Stronghold concept in Special Force Commander's Training Note No. 8. It is quoted in full in Michael Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope* (London: Leo Cooper, 1971), 282–88.

21. Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, 225–28. See also Tulloch and Calvert, 21–24. The intelligence officer who took the photos was Lt Charles Russhon, US Army Air Forces, who later was technical advisor on the first James Bond films. He arranged, among other things, the filming of *Goldfinger* at Fort Knox.

22. Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, 225–26.

23. Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope*, 27–33. Tulloch, *Wingate in Peace and War*, 207–08, has statistics on glider operations of the night 5–6 March.
24. Brett-James, *Ball of Fire*, 299–301; and statistics come from Appendix F of the IV Corps Quartermaster War Diary, March 1944. The numbers include 1,550 men, 16 jeeps, and 11 motor-carriers flown in via 113 sorties as advance units on 14 March; the majority of the lift was 20–26 March. Heavy transport and equipment was left behind, to come by road and rail later as best they could. The 5th Indian Division was relieved in the Arakan by 25th and 26th Indian Divisions.
25. Brett-James, *Ball of Fire*, 299–301. One pilot asked his passengers where they wanted to go; another asked for the name of the field they had just left. A third panicked when his load of mules started kicking, and he shot them all.
26. Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, 305. For more on the defense of Kohima, see Christopher L. Kolakowski, “Is That the End or Do We Go On: The Battle of Kohima, 1944,” *Army History* 111 (Spring 2019): 6–19.
27. For an overview of these operations, see Christopher L. Kolakowski, “The Coming of Modern War: The Coalition War in North Burma, 1944,” *Army History* 107 (Spring 2018): 6–27.
28. Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope*, 16–17; Thomas, *Back to Mandalay*, 155; see also a memo from Captain H.L. Greengus to Brigadier General Frank Merrill dated 17 May 1944, Stilwell Papers, Hoover Institution.
29. Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope*, 16–17; Thomas, *Back to Mandalay*, 155; see also Greengus memo.
30. See a report from Major D.A. Yeti in Haydon Boatner Papers, Hoover Institution.
31. Robert F. Dorr, *The First Helicopter Rescue: Where the Special Operations Combat Rescue Mission Began*, Defense Media Network, 15 January 2015, <https://www.defensemedianetwork.com/>.
32. Bernard Fergusson, *The Wild Green Earth* (London: Collins, 1952), 222, 232.
33. Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, 543, 546.
34. For more detailed discussion of these points, see Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, 543–46.
35. Stilwell’s letter to Gen Hap Arnold is in Stilwell Papers, Hoover Institution.

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