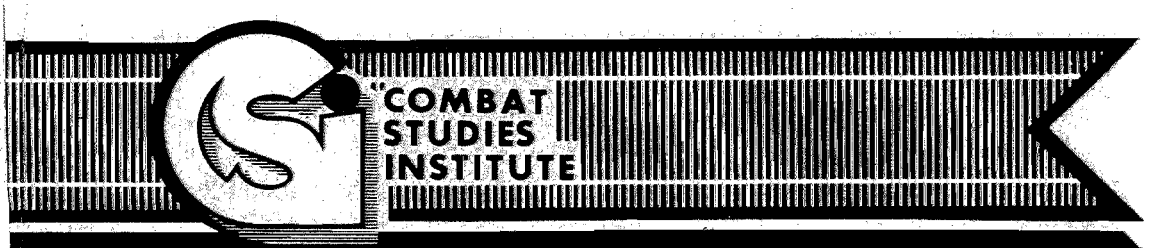
Merrill's Marauders: Combined Operations in Northern Burma in 1944

by
Gary J. Bjorge



FOREWORD

Coalition warfare is generally a two-edged sword. When several countries join forces to fight a common enemy, the weight of their combined effort can be overwhelming. The effectiveness of this effort, however, can be dissipated or even rendered counterproductive if members of the coalition cannot find common ground among themselves on such vital issues as the nature and objectives of the war and the appropriate strategy, command structure, and methods for fighting it.

In this Special Study, Dr. Gary Bjorge of the Combat Studies Institute offers a case study in coalition warfare during the Second World War. While the focus of his study is Merrill's Marauders, his analysis offers a broader perspective on how coalition considerations affected strategy, command and protocol, and military operations and tactics in the China-Burma-India theater. The lesson for today's professional officer is clear. It may be the responsibility of the political authorities to fashion a wartime coalition, but once in place, the partnership will have an impact on military considerations from the strategic through the tactical levels. Few officers involved in the combined effort will escape the fallout in one form or another from decisions made by the coalition leaders. Officers must be prepared for this, and Dr. Bjorge's study is designed to assist in that preparation.



January 1996

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Printed courtesy of the U.S. Army Center of Military History,
Washington, D.C.

Combat Studies Institute
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027–6900

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bjorge, Gary J.
Merrill's Marauders : combined operations in northern Burma in 1944 / by Gary J. Bjorge
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references
1. United States. Army. Composite Unit (Provisional), 5307th–History. 2. World War. 1939–1945
Regimental histories–United States. 3. World War, 1939-1945–Campaigns–Burma. I. Title.
D767.6.B56 1966
940 . 54' 1273—dc20 96–20759
CIP

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During World War II, the United States fought as a member of the largest military coalition ever formed. Across the world, millions of American soldiers, sailors, and airmen joined with the fighting forces of other nations to defeat the Axis Powers. As they did so, they wrote many new chapters in the history of coalition warfare and combined operations. Of those chapters, none illustrates the benefits and the difficulties inherent in this type of warfare more vividly than does the story of what happened to "Merrill's Marauders" in northern Burma.

"Merrill's Marauders" is the popular name given to the U.S. Army's 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) (also known by its code name Galahad), a regiment-sized unit organized and trained for long-range penetration behind enemy lines in Japanese-held Burma in World War II. The 5307th had a short history. Recruitment for the unit began on 1 September 1943, and it was disbanded on 10 August 1944. The unit did not reach India until 31 October 1943 and was only in combat in Burma from the end of February 1944 to the first days of August. But during that period, the 5307th established an impressive record. In fighting against Japanese forces and in its constant struggle against disease, leeches, insects, harsh terrain, and the weather, the "Marauders" earned the following Distinguished Unit Citation:

> The 5307th Composite Unit (Prov) was the first United States ground combat force to meet the enemy in World War II on the continent of Asia. After a series of successful engagements in the Hukawng and Mogaung Valleys of North Burma, in March and April 1944, the unit was called on to lead a march over jungle trails through extremely mountainous terrain against stubborn resistance in an attack on Myitkyina. The unit proved equal its task, overcame all the obstacles put in its way by the enemy, and the weather and, after a brilliant operation 17 May 1944, seized the airfield at Myitkyina, an objective of great tactical importance in the campaign, and assisted in the capture of Myitkyina on 3 August 1944. The successful accomplishment of this mission marks the 5307th Composite Unit (Prov) as an outstanding combat force and reflects great credit on Allied Arms.[1]

The accomplishments of the 5307th, however, were achieved at a tremendous human cost. The total strength of the unit at the beginning of its operations was 2,997 officers and men. Because some of the men received rear-echelon assignments such as parachute riggers and "kickers"(i.e., men who kicked bundles of supplies out of transport aircraft during air drops), the actual number of men who set out on the first mission on 24 February was 2,750. After this operation ended with the capture of Walawbum on 7 March, about 2,500 remained to carry on.[2] The unit's second mission, from 12 March to 9 April, resulted in 67 men killed and 379 evacuated because of wounds or illness. Thereby reduced to about 2,000 men, the 5307th was augmented by Chinese and native Kachin soldiers for its third mission, the operation to take the Myitkyina airfield, which began on 28 April. Only 1,310 Americans reached this objective, and between 17 May and 1 June, the large majority of these men, most of whom were suffering from disease, were evacuated by air to rear-area hospitals. By the time the town of Myitkyina was taken, only about 200 of the original Galahad force was present.[3] A week after Myitkyina fell, on 10 August 1944, the 5307th, utterly worn out and depleted, was disbanded.[4]

Why did the 5307th end up this way? Why was the first U.S. combat unit to fight on the Asian continent driven until it suffered over 80 percent casualties and experienced what an inspector general's report described as "an almost complete breakdown of morale in the major portion of the unit"?[5] Colonel Charles N. Hunter, the second ranking (and sometime ranking) officer of the unit during its existence, expected heavy casualties from the start. In briefings at the War Department in September 1943, he was told that casualties were projected to reach 85 percent.[6] But at the end of the 5307th's campaign, he still felt that the unit had been badly misused and had suffered unnecessarily. Years later, in a book about the 5307th titled *Galahad*, he placed the blame for what happened to the unit squarely on the personality and personal ambition of the campaign's commander, Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell:

> Galahad Force was the most beat upon, most misunderstood, most mishandled, most written about, most heroic, and yet most unrewarded

> regimental sized unit that participated in World War II. That it was expendable was understood from its inception; what was not understood and has never been adequately explained, is why it was expended to bolster the ego of an erstwhile Theater Commander such as "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell.[7]

Colonel Hunter's account of events is compelling and moving. It is easy to understand why he felt that Stilwell had sacrificed the 5307th to bolster his ego. Yet in assessing the criticism of Stilwell, it must not be forgotten that, during this period, he was acting under orders from above and was under pressure to achieve specific military objectives set by the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). In addition, Stilwell had to cope with the problems created in the China-Burma-India theater of war (CBI) by coalition warfare and the need to conduct combined operations. In this theater, more than in any other theater in which the United States fought during World War II, the problems peculiar to coalition warfare were present. While the coalition partners of the United States in the CBI–China and Great Britain–helped augment United States resources and contributed significantly to the war against Japan, they also created situations that forced Stilwell to lay heavy burdens on the 5307th. Ultimately, it was not so much that the 5307th was a victim of Stilwell's ego, but that both the 5307th and Stilwell were affected by the exigencies and requirements of coalition warfare and combined operations.

Coalitions, by nature, are somewhat delicate creations. They are formed by sovereign nations who join together to provide the strength of numbers for the pursuit of a common goal or goals. But national differences in strategic aims can diminish the force a coalition can bring to bear at a particular place and time. Also, differences in military capabilities, warfighting doctrine, cultural traditions, social values, and language can make it difficult for coalition forces to achieve unity of effort in combined operations. All of these debilitating conditions were present in the CBI as the three coalition partners sought to fight the war against Japan in ways consistent with their national objectives. Interestingly, because of these different objectives, neither Great Britain, the former colonial ruler of Burma, nor China—who would regain a land link to the outside world if

northern Burma were retaken—were as committed to retaking northern Burma as was the United States. These different viewpoints had created tensions in the coalition since the start of the war. In 1944, lack of agreement about what to do in Burma contributed greatly to what happened to the 5307th.

The British did not give a high priority to retaking northern Burma because of doubts about Chinese military capabilities and the belief that reestablishing a land link to China would not make much difference in the war against Japan. Great Britain's primary focus remained on Europe and the Mediterranean area. The British did not want to commit large forces to retaking Burma, and at the great war conferences of 1943, they consistently argued either for reducing the scale of operations to be undertaken in Burma or for bypassing Burma altogether and going to Sumatra.

China's position was that of Chiang K'ai-shek, president and commander of the Chinese Army. His government was weak and faced many internal challenges, especially from the Communists. He did not want to see his military forces consumed in battles with the Japanese because he would then have fewer troops to support him in internal disputes. He welcomed American aid and sought more. Yet he was also leery of training and assistance programs because they might strengthen his domestic rivals. As Stilwell told General George C. Marshall, chief of staff of the U.S. Army in mid-1943, "[Chiang] did not want the regime to have a large, efficient ground force for fear that its commander would inevitably challenge his position as China's leader."[8] Chiang's fundamental approach to the war with Japan was to adopt a defensive posture and let the United States win it for him, preferably with air power. He was more interested in expanding the airlift from India to China than in reestablishing a land link.

In contrast to Great Britain and China, the United States took an activist position on Burma and on China itself. As opposed to Britain's negative view of what China could offer, the United States saw China's geographic position and large manpower pool as great assets. America believed that it was possible to improve the Chinese

Army so that it could make a positive contribution to the coming offensive against Japan. Even before becoming an active belligerent, the United States, in May 1941, had begun sending lend-lease material to China. In July 1941, the American Military Mission to China had been established to help China procure weapons to fight its war against Japan and to train personnel to use them. Stilwell had been sent to China in February 1942 to expand this effort, with specific orders to "increase the effectiveness of United States assistance to the Chinese government for the prosecution of the war and to assist in improving the combat efficiency of the Chinese Army."[9] After the Japanese occupied Burma in the spring of 1942 and cut China's last landline of communication to the outside world, the United States made reestablishing that land link a high priority. Overland transportation was seen as essential to providing more aid to China.

At the coalition war conferences convened during 1943, the concept of Burma as the route to China led the United States to stress continually the need to retake Burma. At the Casablanca Conference, held on 14–23 January, the American JCS put an offensive to retake Burma high on the conference agenda and obtained British agreement to conduct the operation in the winter of 1943–44. At the Trident Conference held in Washington in May 1943, the United States agreed with the British that developments in the war in Europe made it advisable to scale back this offensive so that it would just cover northern Burma. At American insistence, however, it was also agreed that a land link to China through this area must be gained during the coming winter dry season.

Three months later, the Quadrant Conference, held in Quebec, Canada, on 19–24 August, reaffirmed the need for restoring land communications with China. Looking into the future, American and British planners envisioned Chinese forces and U.S. forces in the Pacific converging on the Canton-Hong Kong area. Once emplaced there, these forces would drive north to liberate north China and establish staging areas for operations against Japan. The year 1947 was set for operations against Japan proper.[10] Retaking northern Burma and constructing the Ledo Road south through Myitkyina to the old Burma Road was a fundamental part of this strategic plan, in

that the road would bring in supplies for the Chinese forces that would move toward Canton from the northwest.

The Quadrant Conference also led to the U.S. decision to send a combat unit, Galahad, to CBI to participate in the upcoming winter offensive. The U.S. Army had long had a large number of support units in the theater. In late December 1942, the U.S. 823d Engineer Aviation Battalion had taken over construction from the British of the part of the Ledo Road that lay in India. U.S. medical personnel, quartermaster units, and air corps units also had steadily increased in number during 1942 and 1943. But despite Stilwell's requests (since July 1942) for a U.S. combat corps—or at least a division—no fighting units had been sent to the theater. Now, one was going, perhaps to demonstrate the seriousness of America's interest in retaking northern Burma. Or, perhaps, it was being sent as a reward to Brigadier Orde C. Wingate for his aggressiveness, which the United States had found in short supply among the British generals in India.

Wingate was an innovative thinker, who before being assigned to the British forces in Burma in early 1942 had gained experience in guerrilla warfare in Palestine and Ethiopia. Analyzing the tactics used by the Japanese in capturing Burma, he determined that the key to their success was superior mobility. Repeatedly, Japanese units had moved quickly along small trails in the jungle to outflank and envelop road-bound Allied units. Wingate's answer to this tactical challenge was to free Allied units from reliance on roads. He proposed forming highly mobile units (long-range penetration groups [LRPGs]) that would be inserted deep behind the Japanese lines by gliders and transport aircraft and supplied from the air. It was assumed that this method of supply would allow the LRPGs to outmaneuver the Japanese and attack their lines of communications at will. Following the cancellation of an offensive into Burma scheduled for March 1943, General Archibald Wavell, Supreme Commander, India, had authorized Wingate to carry out a raid into Burma to test the validity of Wingate's theories. Despite incurring high losses and effecting little lasting damage, the raid captured the public imagination with its daring. Prime Minister Winston Churchill in-

vited Wingate to London for a personal briefing and then took him to Quebec to attend the Quadrant Conference. There, Wingate won approval from the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) for an expanded program of LRPG operations in Burma. General Marshall and Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold, commander of the U.S. Army Air Corps, were so impressed by Wingate's presentation that they agreed to send approximately 3,000 American infantrymen to India to form an LRPG code-named Galahad. They also decided to send two of the Air Corps' best airmen, Colonel Philip G. Cochran and Lieutenant Colonel J. R. Alison to India "to activate and command No. 1 Air Commando, a custom-made aggregation of liaison aircraft, helicopters, light bombers, fighters, gliders, and transports" that would support Wingate's LRPG operations.[11]

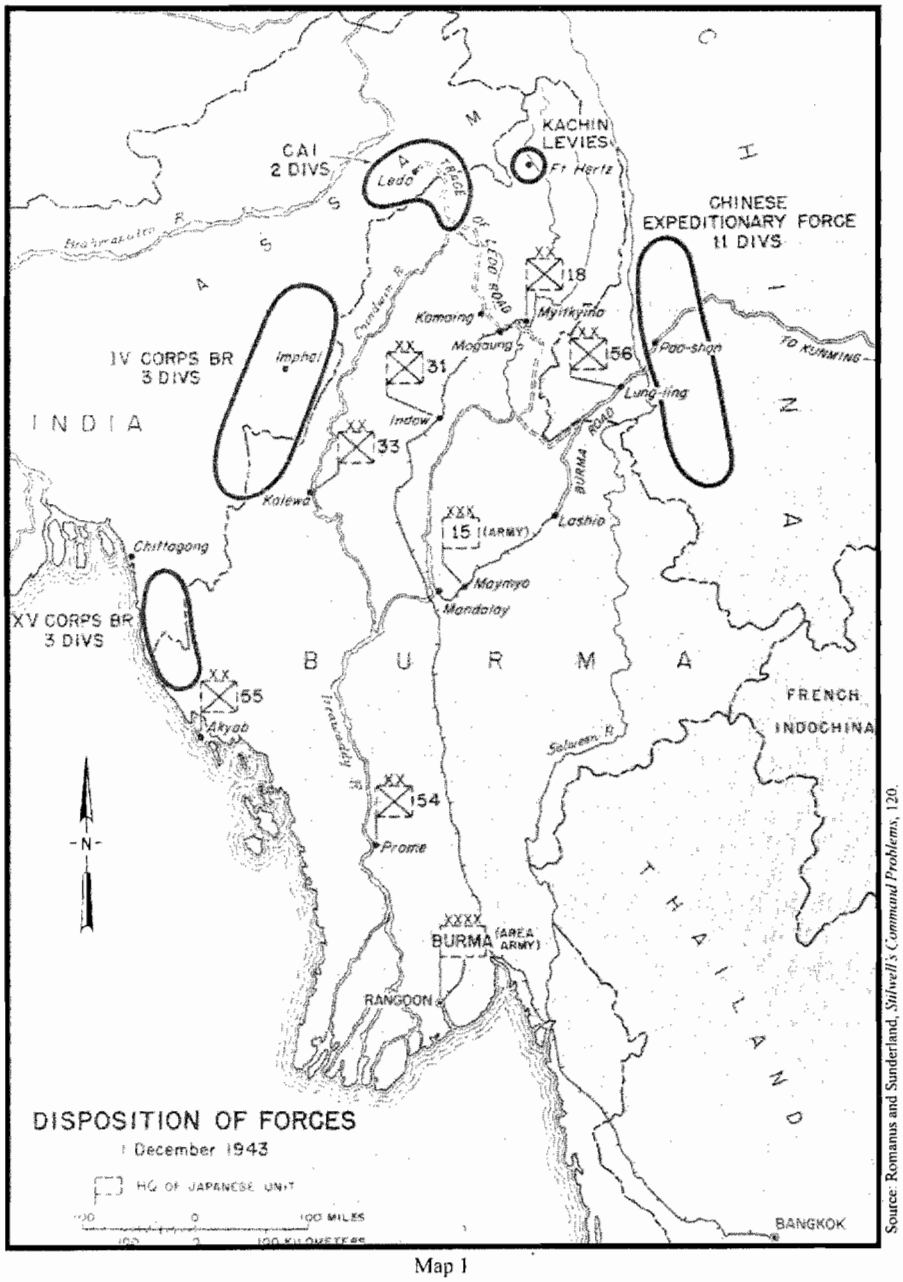
While Galahad was forming in the United States and moving across the Pacific, plans were being made by the newly created Southeast Asia Command (SEAC) to implement the decisions of the Trident-Quadrant Conferences. The British established SEAC to provide stronger direction to the upcoming operations in Burma. Its geographical area of responsibility included Burma, Ceylon, Sumatra, Malaya—but not India or China. Reflecting the preponderance of British forces in the theater, a British officer, Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, was named supreme Allied commander. Stilwell was appointed Mountbatten's acting deputy, but Stilwell's American operational theater, CBI, was not made subordinate to SEAC. Also, Stilwell, in his position as Allied chief of staff to General Chiang K'ai-shek, was not subordinate to Mountbatten. Related to the establishment of SEAC was a crisis in Stilwell's command relationship to Chiang. When Mountbatten went to Chungking, China's wartime capital, on 16 October to meet Chiang and establish a personal relationship, he was told that Chiang not only did not want Stilwell appointed as Mountbatten's deputy but wished to have Stilwell recalled to Washington. Mountbatten objected strongly to such a change so close to the upcoming offensive into Burma and precipitated two days of negotiations that ended with Stilwell ostensibly returned to favor. But ritual smiles and professions of a new, deeper level of mutual understanding could not

reverse the damage already done. Stilwell became more distrustful of Chiang, and a cloud hung over their relationship.

Based on the Quadrant decisions, the CCS gave SEAC two objectives. One was to carry out operations "for the capture of Upper Burma in order to improve the air route and establish overland communications with China."[12] The other was "to continue to build up and increase the air routes and air supplies of China, and the development of air facilities with a view to a) keeping China in the war, b) intensifying operations against the Japanese, c) maintaining increased U.S. and Chinese air forces in China, and d) equipping Chinese ground forces."[13]

To achieve these two objectives, the capture of Myitkyina was deemed essential. Japanese fighter planes flying from their air base at Myitkyina were able to harass the air route between northeast India (Assam) and China and keep the transports flying farther north over higher mountains in the Himalayas. Taking Myitkyina would eliminate this fighter threat. It would also improve greatly the air transport link between India and China, making it possible for transport aircraft to fly a more direct route, at lower altitude, thereby saving fuel and increasing payloads. Furthermore, Myitkyina was on the existing prewar road network in Burma, so once the Ledo Road was completed through Mogaung to Myitkyina, it would be relatively easy to extend it to the old Burma Road (see map 1).

SEAC planners developed a multifaceted plan named Champion to retake northern Burma and presented it at the Sextant Conference held in Cairo, Egypt, in November 1943. The first phase of the plan called for the advance of the Chinese Army in India (CAI) into northwest Burma to provide a protective screen for the engineers constructing the Ledo Road. This phase was already under way by the time of Sextant. Road building had resumed in earnest in October following the end of the summer monsoon. In the second phase, two British corps were to invade Burma from the west and southwest in mid-January. In February, three LRPGs were to be landed in central Burma. In addition, a major amphibious landing would be effected.[14] Meanwhile, fifteen Chinese divisions (the Y-Force or Yoke



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 120.

Map 1

Force that had been equipped and trained by the United States) were expected to attack the Japanese westward from Yunnan province (in China) into eastern Burma. This Y-Force had also been scheduled to take part in an offensive into Burma in March 1943, but Chiang K'ai-shek had withdrawn his agreement to employ this force and thereby scuttled the offensive. Now, at year's end in Cairo, Chiang was meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill for the first time, and it was assumed that his firm commitment to join in this new operation could be obtained.

Once again, however, the vagaries of coalition warfare intervened. The Sextant Conference ended without a clear commitment by Chiang K'ai-shek for Chinese participation in Champion. Then, after Sextant, decisions reached by Churchill and Roosevelt with Stalin at Teheran ensured that Chiang would not become involved. At Teheran, Roosevelt and Churchill committed themselves to a cross-Channel assault and a landing in southern France as soon as possible, and Stalin promised to enter the war against Japan after Germany was defeated. This led Churchill to voice strong opposition to the amphibious landing that was part of Champion, even though Chiang had made it clear that such an operation was a prerequisite for his sending the Y-Force into Burma. Churchill, at this point, felt that China mattered little in the war against Japan. He believed that Stalin's promise to join the war against Japan after Germany's defeat meant that Russian bases would soon be available, and in his opinion, such bases would be better than anything the Chinese could offer.[15] Also, Churchill wanted the amphibious landing craft allocated to Champion shifted to the Mediterranean to be used in the landing in southern France. On 5 December, Roosevelt reluctantly agreed to Churchill's request (overruling the JCS for the only time during the war), and a message was sent to Chiang explaining their decision. Chiang replied that without an amphibious landing to divert Japanese forces, he could not risk sending the Y-Force into Burma.

On 12 December, Stilwell returned to Chungking from Cairo and tried to change Chiang's mind about employing the Y-Force. He was unsuccessful. On 18 December, however, Chiang made a significant concession and gave Stilwell complete authority over the CAI. The

entry in Stilwell's personal diary for 19 December reveals the excitement and the hope that this move engendered:

> 19 December. First time in history. G-mo [Generalissimo Chiang K'ai-shek] gave me full command of the Ledo [X force] troops. Without strings—said there would be no interference and that it was "my army." Gave me full power to fire any and all officers. Cautioned me not to sacrifice it to British interests. Otherwise, use it as I saw fit. Madame [Chiang K'ai-shek's wife] promised to get this in writing so I could show it to all concerned.
>
> It took a long time, but apparently confidence has been established. A month or so ago I was to be fired and now he gives me a blank check. If the bastards will only fight, we can make a dent in the Japs. There is a chance for us to work down to Myitkyina, block off below Mogaung and actually make the junction, even with Yoke sitting on its tukas. This may be wishful thinking in a big way, but it could be.[16]

In a nutshell, this diary entry captures the nature of Stilwell's problems. In keeping with the Quadrant-Sextant goal of retaking northern Burma, he was focused on the objectives of capturing Myitkyina and linking up with the Y-Force (Yoke Force) attacking from Yunnan. But if the Y-Force did not advance, he was not sure if the Ledo Force (the two divisions called the CAI or the X-Force) could reach Myitkyina and make the linkup alone. Stilwell acknowledged that all hope of success might be wishful thinking, but he was determined to give his enterprise a try. A letter written to his wife on the same day further reveals his thoughts:

> Put down 18 December 1943 as the day, when for the first time in history, a foreigner was given command of Chinese troops with full control over all officers and no strings attached. . . . This has been a long uphill fight and when I think of some of our commanders who are handed a ready-made, fully equipped, well-trained army of Americans to work with, it makes me wonder if I'm not working out some of my past sins. They gave me a shoestring and now we've run it up to considerable proportions: The question is, will it snap when we put the weight on it? I've had word from Peanut [Stilwell's name for Chiang K'ai-shek] that I can get away from this dump tomorrow. That means I'll spend Christmas with the Confucianists in the jungle. . . . Until this mess is cleaned up I wouldn't want to be doing anything but working at it, and you wouldn't want me to either, thank God.[17]

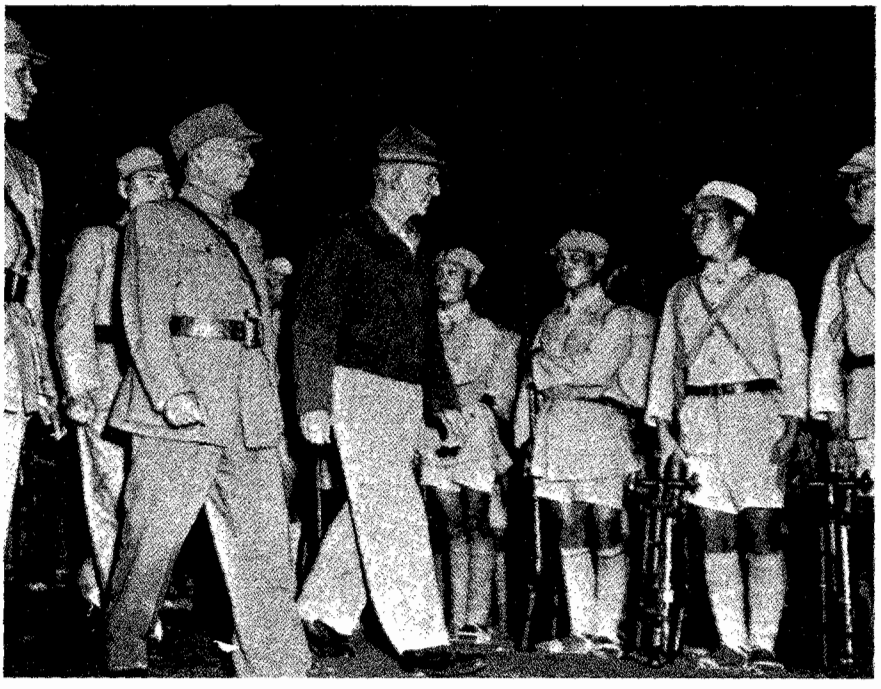
Stilwell's reference to the shoestring that has been run up to "considerable proportions" refers to the CAI, a force that was his own creation. In May 1942, he had looked at the 9,000 Chinese soldiers who had retreated from Burma into India and seen the nucleus of a force that could play an important role in a campaign to retake northern Burma. Overcoming British doubts, resistance from the government of India, and Chiang K'ai-shek's reluctance, he had obtained agreement to equip and train not only those 9,000 troops but 23,000 more soldiers that were to be flown in from China. A former camp for Italian prisoners of war located northwest of Calcutta at Ramgarh was selected as the training site, and on 26 August 1942, the Ramgarh Training Center was activated.[18] On 20 October, the first of the Chinese soldiers to be sent from China arrived in India.[19] The first goal was to train two complete divisions, the 22d and the 38th. Later, the training program was expanded to include another division, the 30th, and the Chinese 1st Provisional Tank Group, commanded by Colonel Rothwell H. Brown of the U.S. Army.



General Stilwell observing the training of Chinese troops at the Ramgarh Training Center

For Stilwell, building the CAI was a way to obtain the military force that he feared the United States would never be able to provide him. He also viewed it as an opportunity to test his deeply held belief that Chinese soldiers, if properly trained, equipped, fed, and led, would be the equal of soldiers anywhere. In an agreement reached on 24 July 1942, Chiang K'ai-shek had given Stilwell command of the CAI at Ramgarh and control of its training; the Chinese were to handle administration and discipline.[20] With this much freedom of action, Stilwell initiated an American-style training program with American instructors. They taught the use of rifles, light and heavy machine guns, 60-mm and 81-mm mortars, rocket launchers, hand grenades, 37-mm antitank guns, and the functional specialties required by modern warfare. Artillery units learned how to use 75-mm pack artillery, 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers, and assault guns. All units received training in jungle warfare. For medical service personnel, special emphasis was given to field sanitation so that the diseases that had taken a heavy toll in Burma in the spring of 1942 could at least be partially prevented.[21]

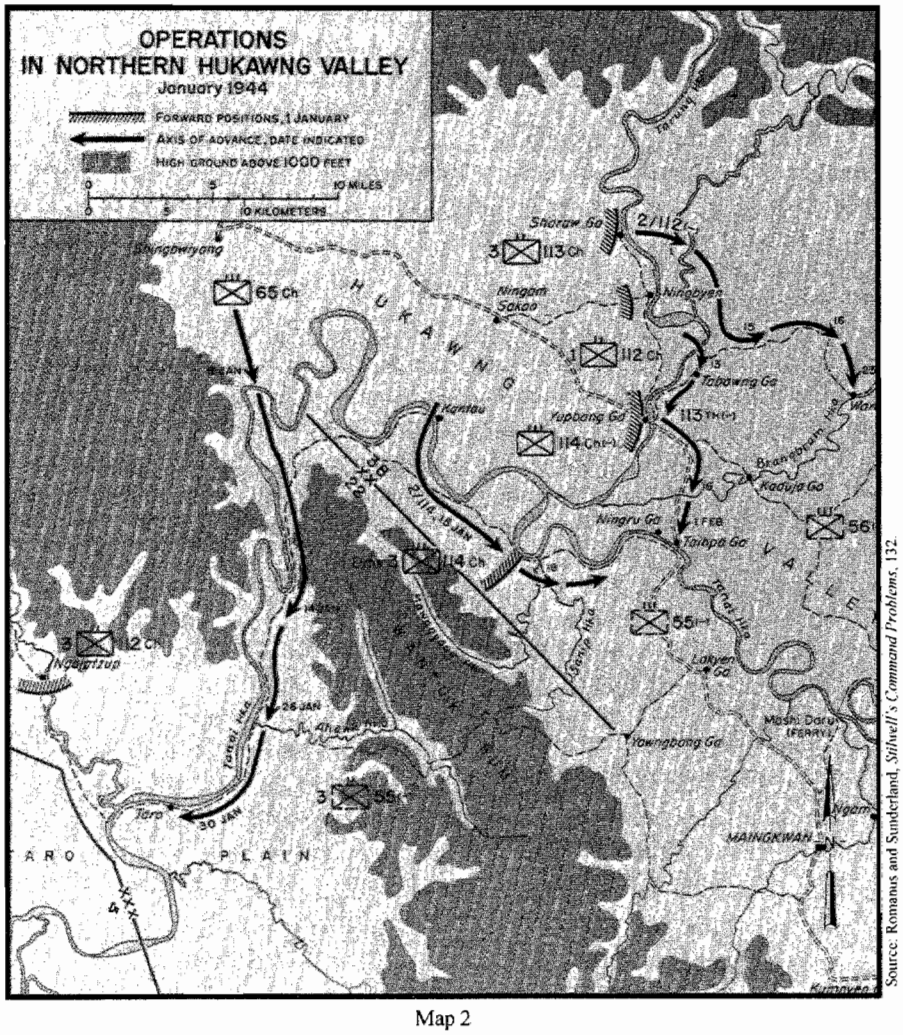
As Stilwell flew toward Burma on 20 December, he was not worried about the technical proficiency of the CAI. That had been developed and tested at Ramgarh. What concerned him was the lack of aggressive leadership on the part of Chinese officers. The CAI's 38th Division had entered the Hukawng Valley in October to screen the engineers building the Ledo Road and had been stopped by elements of the Japanese 18th Division. Stilwell was unhappy with the 38th Division's inability to push ahead and, after arriving at the front on 21 December, he tried various methods to develop some forward momentum. He talked directly to the division commander, Sun Li-jen, and issued him firm, detailed orders. He also went down to the front to observe what was happening and to try to force the unit into action. One battalion commander from the 38th Division recounts how Stilwell sometimes drove down to regimental headquarters in his jeep and stayed until the regimental or, in some cases, even the division commander acted to eliminate an enemy position that was blocking forward movement.[22] Stilwell acknowledged that the Japanese were a tough foe and that the terrain was very difficult. But



General Stilwell, Major General Sun Li-jen (extreme left) and Lieutenant General Lo Cho-ying (center) inspect Chinese Army troops in India at Ramgarh

he also saw the Chinese failure to advance as resulting, in large part, from their own errors: "Dissipation of force . . . . Piece-meal action . . . . Extreme caution and extreme slowness of movement . . . . Fear of imaginary terrors . . . . Bad recon and security . . . . Fear of going around . . . . Result—Loss of men. Loss of chance to bag Japs."[23] (See map 2.)

Stilwell looked to the 5307th as a solution to several of these errors, especially the "fear of going around." Galahad had been formed, as has already been noted, to be an LRPG under Wingate. Its training was focused on developing the cross-country mobility that would enable Stilwell to conduct the "end run" (enveloping) maneuvers that he felt were needed to encircle the Japanese and dislodge them from their dug-in defenses. But Stilwell would not be able to employ the 5307th in his operation until the end of February. He would have to wait, satisfying himself with the knowledge that at least he had finally taken control of the unit from the British.



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 132.

Map 2

When Stilwell first heard that Galahad, the first American ground combat troops to be sent to CBI, would be coming to India to be part of Wingate's force, he was extremely angry, as the following entry in his diary on 1 September 1943, makes clear:

> What's the matter with our people? After a long struggle, we get a handful of U.S. troops, and by God, they tell us they are to operate under WINGATE! We don't know enough to handle them, but that exhibitionist does! And what has he done? Made an abortive jaunt to

> Katha, got caught E. of the Irrawaddy and come out with a loss of 40%—Net result, cut the RR that our people had already cut [by air attacks]. Now he's an expert. This is enough to discourage Christ.[24]

Stilwell then began a series of moves in which he attemped to gain operational control of Galahad. These efforts finally reached the point where General Marshall felt compelled to send him a message confirming Wingates' operational control over the 5307th and reminding him that coalition warfare required compromise:

> All American troops in China, Burma, India (including Galahad) are under your command. As Deputy Commander to Mountbatten you are to employ your forces, including Chinese troops attached by the Generalissimo, so as to insure an effective united effort by South-East Asian Command. Galahad was dispatched to India to take part in long-range penetration operations. If these operations are to be commanded by Wingate, the American group should operate in combat under his central direction. The individual and unit training as well as administration and supply must remain the responsibility of General Stilwell. However, their training must be closely co-ordinated with that of the British. . . .We must all eat some crow if we are to fight the same war together. The impact on the Japs is the pay-off.[25]

Stilwell, however, did not give up his pursuit of Galahad. At the Sextant Conference, he and his chief of staff for plans and operations, G3 for CBI, Colonel Frank D. Merrill, discussed the employment of Galahad with Marshall and finally convinced him to support a transfer of operational control of the unit to Stilwell. Before the conference ended, a decision was reached. Galahad was to be assigned to Stilwell.[26]

On 1 January 1943, Galahad was officially designated the 5307th Composite Regiment. The next day, the name was changed to Composite Unit (Provisional). Apparently, this name change was necessitated by the realization that the man chosen by Stilwell to command the unit, Frank D. Merrill, was now a brigadier general and should command more than a provisional regiment.[27] Merrill arrived at the 5307th's training area in central India on 4 January and assumed command immediately. Within days, despite Hunter's feeling that the 5307th needed another month of training, Merrill radioed Stilwell that the unit's "training had advanced to a state which would permit

its being committed to action."[28] On 8 January, the 5307th was attached to Stilwell's field command in northern Burma and directed to move to Ledo by 7 February.[29]

The 5307th moved from Ramgarh to Ledo by train, covering a distance of around 1,000 miles. Then they marched 140 miles by foot on the newly completed Ledo Road to Ningbyen, a small village in the northern Hukawng Valley. There, the unit assembled during 20–21 February, received an airdrop of supplies, and prepared for its first mission.

While the 5307th was moving from Ramgarh to Ningbyen, on the battle line CAI fighting was improving. In a message sent to Marshall on 28 January, Stilwell expressed satisfaction with the Chinese soldiers' performance and also made reference to something that constantly irritated him, namely, British unwillingness to recognize CAI accomplishments: "My opinion of the Chinese soldier is what it has always been. With good training, equipment, and leadership,



General Stilwell and Brigadier General Merrill confer at Merrill's headquarters

he is as good as anybody . . . The foregoing is heartily concurred in by all liaison officers with whom I have talked. P.S. I will keep you informed of developments, since I suspect you will hear very little about us in SEAC communiques."[30] On 24 February, Stilwell told Marshall that a mistake by the 22d Division's 66th Regiment had cost them a chance to encircle some Japanese, but he gave Marshall a favorable assessment for both the 22d and 38th Divisions. He reported that Chinese morale was high and said that he was hoping for a "better performance during the next step."[31] This step was to be the 5307th's first operation.

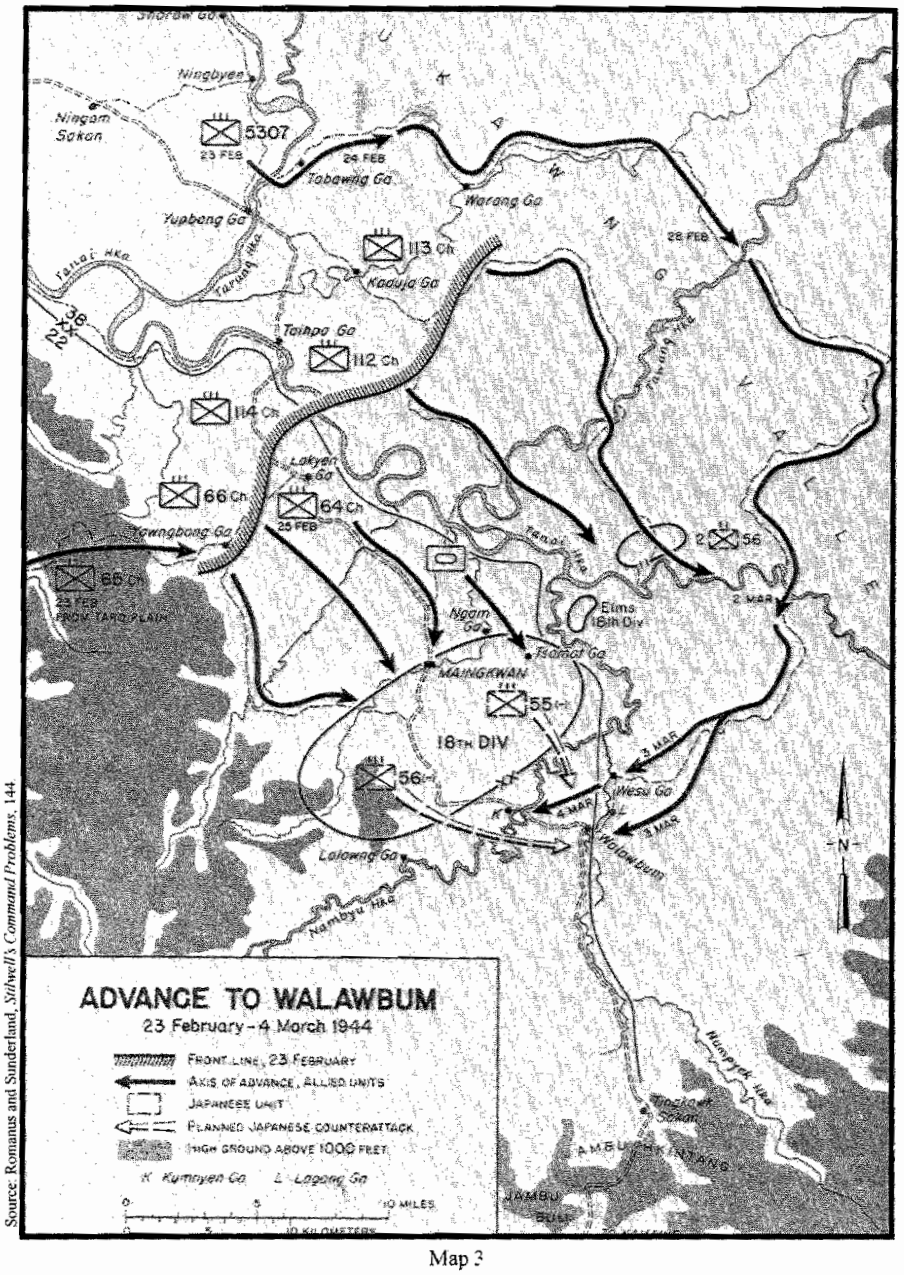
Even as the CAI was advancing in the field and the 5307th was moving forward to join the fighting, there was, at the strategic-political level, some backsliding by the coalition partners. Chiang K'ai-shek's continued refusal to send his Y-Force across the Salween River into Burma was evidence of the low priority China gave the campaign. The CAI's slow rate of movement reflected the Chinese fear of failure. This situation, in turn, encouraged the British feeling, long held, that nothing worthwhile could be accomplished in northern Burma. Firm British support for the north Burma campaign was essential because Burma was in a British theater and Stilwell had two British superiors whose approval was required for him to act. In his position as the acting deputy commander of SEAC, Stilwell was Mountbatten's superior. In addition, on 31 December, Stilwell had placed his field combat command that controlled the CAI and the 5307th under General William J. Slim, commander of the British Fourteenth Army. In early January, the British planners in SEAC began trying to torpedo Stilwell's offensive. Looking at the Ledo Force's slow rate of advance, they were very doubtful that Myitkyina could be taken soon enough to allow the Ledo Road to be constructed before the monsoon rains came. Without this road link, they concluded, Myitkyina could not be held.[32] In place of Stilwell's campaign, they revived—and Mountbatten approved—an earlier plan to bypass Burma and attack Sumatra as a step toward retaking the Dutch East Indies and Singapore.[33] This led Stilwell to write angrily in his diary on 8 January: "Louis [Mountbatten] welches on entire program [for Burma offensive]. G-mo's fault of course. Limey program: (1)

Stop road at Ledo. (2) Do not attack Burma. (3) Go to Sumatra. (4) Include Hongkong in SEAC!"[34]

Stilwell's anger deepened when he learned that Mountbatten was preparing to dispatch a mission to London and Washington in February to promote his new plan. Without notifying Mountbatten, Stilwell sent his own mission led by Brigadier General Hayden L. Boatner, his chief of staff and deputy commander of the CAI, to Washington to present his views to the JCS. After the JCS strongly opposed Mountbatten's plan, Mountbatten blamed Stilwell's mission for influencing their actions and asked that Stilwell be relieved of his SEAC duties on the grounds of insubordination.[35] Marshall quickly intervened and saved Stilwell's job by explaining to the British that the JCS had consistently opposed the concept underlying Mountbatten's proposed operation and that Stilwell's mission had not affected their position. In characteristic fashion, Marshall also sent a message to Stilwell, on 2 March, directing him to see Mountbatten at once and reestablish good personal relations. The meeting was held on 6 March and achieved that objective. Mountbatten assured Stilwell that he supported his campaign.

While Stilwell was meeting with Mountbatten, the first combined operation involving the 5307th and the CAI was drawing to a successful conclusion. This strengthened Stilwell's position that the Japanese could be defeated, northern Burma retaken, and the Ledo Road completed. But, Stilwell told Mountbatten, holding northern Burma would take more than two Chinese divisions. He encouraged Mountbatten to put pressure on Chiang K'ai-shek to get the Y-Force committed. He also asked Mountbatten to help squelch the detractors of the American-Chinese campaign in northern Burma.[36] These people, in Stilwell's opinion, were hurting his efforts to build up Chinese confidence and make Chiang feel that his troops in Burma were gaining glory for both China and for Chiang himself.

The first operation involving the 5307th had begun on the morning of 24 February with the front line positioned approximately fifteen kilometers north of Maingkwan, the former administrative center of the Hukawng Valley and the largest town in northern Burma (see map



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 144

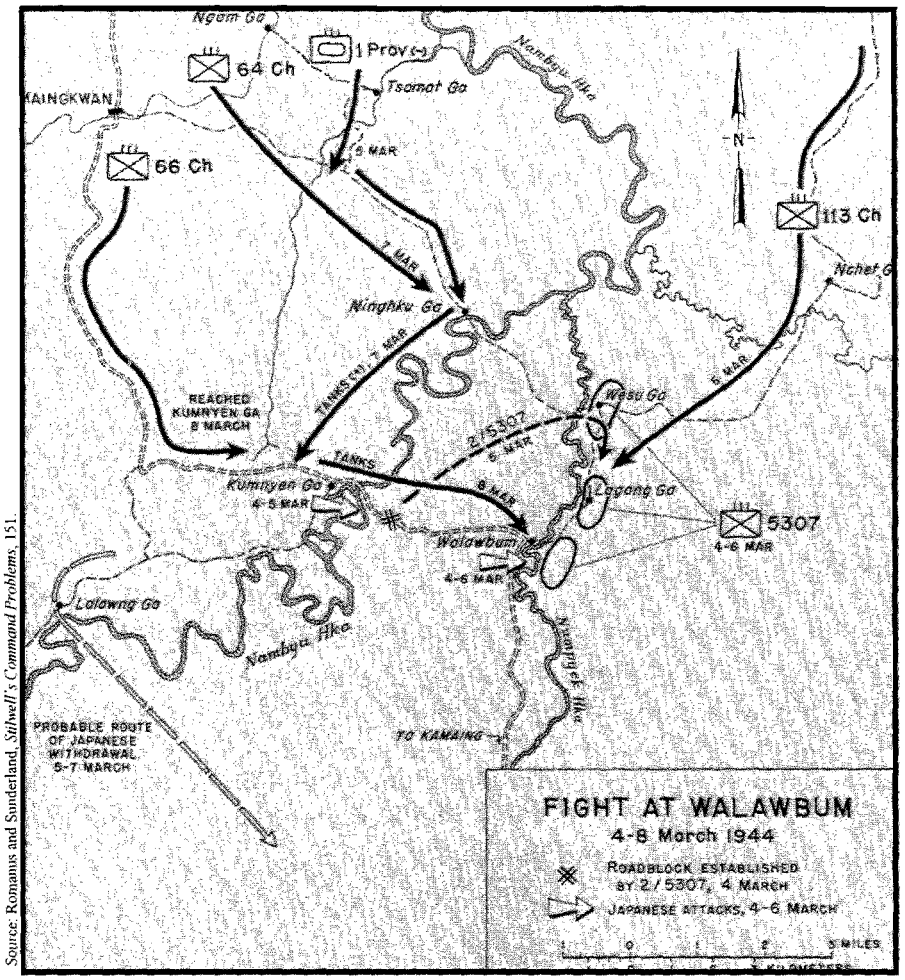
Map 3

3). While the main body of the Chinese 38th and 22d Divisions and the Chinese 1st Provisional Tank Group put pressure on the 18th

Division front north of Maingkwan, the 5307th, with the 38th Division's 113th Regiment following, moved east around the 18th Division's right flank. Stilwell's intention was to have the 5307th establish a roadblock well behind the front and trap the 18th Division. On 28 February, Stilwell, having decided that the roadblock should be located at Walawbum, a small village some fifteen kilometers south of Maingkwan, sent out a liaison aircraft to deliver his order to move there as rapidly as possible. On 2 March, the 5307th crossed the Tanai River, some twenty kilometers northeast of Walawbum, set up an assembly area, and received its final orders from Stilwell's headquarters. Movement toward Walawbum began at dawn on 3 March. During the day, the 5307th's 1st Battalion secured a dropping zone at Lagang Ga, and the 3d Battalion set up heavy weapons commanding the road south of the town. On the morning of 4 March, the 2d Battalion reached the road about a mile and a half west of town and set up a roadblock.[37]

The Japanese response was quick in coming. After learning of the 5307th's presence, General Giichi Tanaka, the commander of the 18th Division, decided that he could use a small rear guard to delay the cautious Chinese and turn the bulk of his two regiments to face the threat in his rear. On 3 March, just as the 5307th was moving forward to establish its positions, the Japanese 55th Regiment began to move south toward the 5307th's right flank and the 56th Regiment began to move southeastward toward its left flank.[38]

Heavy Japanese attacks began on 4 March and continued through the next day. The 2d Battalion of the 5307th received especially heavy blows , and after fighting for thirty-six hours without food and water and with ammunition running low, it abandoned its roadblock on the night of 5 March and withdrew to Wesu Ga (see map 4).[39] During this time, Allied aircraft bombed and strafed apparent Japanese troop concentrations. The air attack diminished Tanaka's ability to execute his plan, but his failure to destroy the 5307th was due more to the arrival of the Chinese tank force led by Colonel Brown. On the afternoon of 5 March, this unit pushed into an area between the 18th Division headquarters and 56th Regiment headquarters and, without realizing the significance of its target, began firing on



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 151.

Map 4

Tanaka's command post.[40] The tanks were also blocking the trial that the 55th Regiment was to use for its attack. Face with this situation, Tanaka decided, late on 5 March, to move his force to the west between the advancing 22d Division and the 2d Battalion roadblock and reestablish a line across the Kamaing Road south of Walawbum. Because of the slow advance of the 22d Division, Tanaka was able to accomplish this maneuver and escape what could have become a trap.

On 7 March, in keeping with Stilwell's orders to keep casualties low,[41] Merrill arranged for the 113th Regiment to take over the 5307th's positions, and the 5307th withdrew from the battle. Its first mission thus ended as a success. Casualties had been light: only eight men had been killed and thirty-seven wounded during the fighting in which an estimated 800 Japanese had died.[42] The 5307th had proven its ability to move cross-country supported by long-distance radio communication and regular airdrops. It had also worked successfully with the Chinese and another group that had become part of the combined force, the native Kachin people.

The importance of support from the local inhabitants cannot be overestimated. General William J. Slim has noted the value of the help given the Japanese by the Burmese in the spring of 1942: "For warning of our proximity they relied largely on Burman informers, and for their routes on local guides."[43] Charlton Ogburn, a veteran of the 5307th, writes in his book *The Marauders* that, in northern Burma, the situation was reversed to the great benefit of the Allies:

> The advantage the Japanese had in having only to hide and wait and hold on. . . . would have forced us to pay an exorbitant price for any successes, despite the Allies' superiority in numbers and virtual command of the air, but for one asset we had: the local population was with us. Thinly settled as the hills of northern Burma were, that factor made a critical difference.[44]

The Americans made a conscious effort to gain and nurture this asset. Boatner directed the medical units attached to the CAI "to furnish medical attention to the natives as far as practicable to obtain their friendship for the U.S. Army."[45] Hunter mentions how the 5307th never watered their pack animals at village springs and sometimes carried water a fairly long distance to their animals in order to avoid damaging the springs and "irritating the natives in whose good graces we wished to remain."[46] Ogburn notes that enlisting the cooperation of the Kachins was "an important job of one of the most important members of the 5307th, our British liaison officer, Captain Charles Evan Darlington."[47] Darlington had served as a political officer in the area before the war and had lived in

Maingkwan for five years. He was known and respected among the Kachins and, in Ogburn's words, "was indispensable not only as a supplier of guides but as a guide himself."[48]

The 5307th's first mission also showed its ability to coordinate action with CAI units. Despite the language barrier and differences between the Americans and the Chinese in diet, methods of cooking, personal mannerisms, and ways of setting up camp, they developed a feeling of mutual respect. The Americans understood that they needed the numbers provided by the Chinese. Because the 5307th had no artillery, the Americans also appreciated Chinese firepower. Ogburn describes the warm welcome given the Chinese artillery when the 113th Regiment relieved the 5307th at Walawbum:

> As the columns moved past each other, we heard cheering in American voices from up ahead. It grew louder, coming down the line toward us, and when it reached us, we could see the cause. In the Chinese column, a battery of pack artillery was moving forward with the infantry. We too cheered while the Chinese beamed. The pieces were only 75-millimeter howitzers and hardly a match for the 105's and walloping 150's with which the Japanese had visited humiliation on us, but all the same, they were guns and they could throw shells and they were on our side and they were a stirring sight.[49]

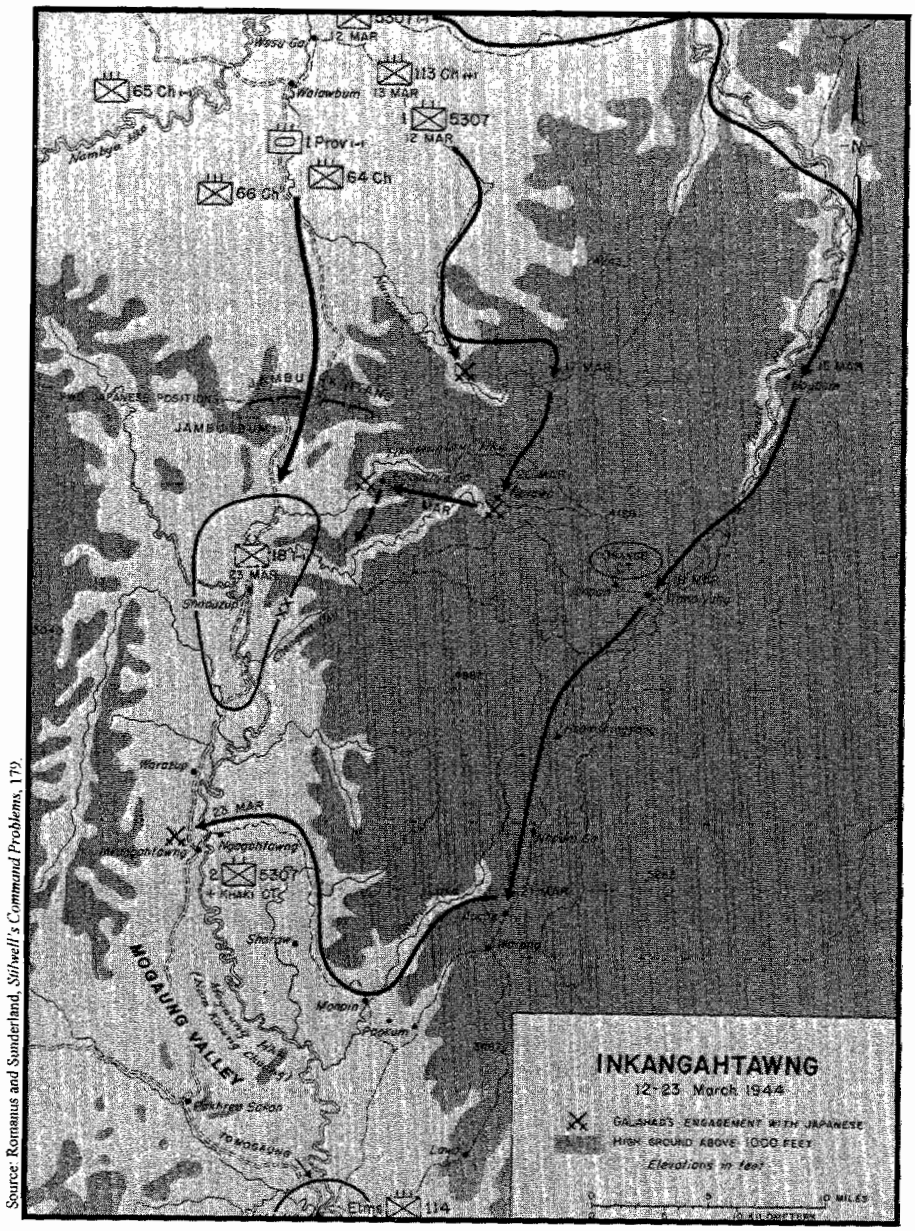
Unfortunately for the 5307th, however, even as the Chinese were helping them fight the Japanese at Walawbum, they were seriously degrading the health of the unit by unintentionally contaminating the drinking water. Hunter notes that before the 5307th pulled out of Walawbum, 350 cases of amoebic dysentery were diagnosed because of contaminated drinking water: "Only too late at Walawbum did we learn that the Chinese units were using the stream, from which we obtained our drinking water, as a latrine. Those men who, through force of circumstance or by choice, relied on halizone tablets to purify their drinking water soon became the victims of amoebic dysentery of the worst type."[50] This situation was undoubtedly exacerbated by a difference in Chinese and American habits. Ogburn states that the Chinese "took time to boil all their drinking water, [while] . . . far from boiling what they drank, many of the Marauders could not even be bothered to await the action of the halizone tablets in their canteens

but would pop the tablets in their mouths like aspirin and wash them down with a pint of water dipped out of a trail side stream."[51]

After the battle for Walawbum, the Japanese retained control of only a small part of the southern Hukawng Valley. To keep the momentum of the CAI advance, push the Japanese out of the Hukawng Valley, and enter the Mogaung Valley, Stilwell now directed the 5307th to undertake another envelopment of 18th Division positions. The 1st Battalion, followed at a day's interval by the 113th Regiment, was to conduct a shallow envelopment and block the Kamaing Road south of the Japanese positions along the Jambu Bum ridge, the high ground that divided the Hukawng and Mogaung Valleys. Meanwhile, the 2d and 3d Battalions were to swing farther east around the Japanese and then move west to block the road in the Inkangahtawng area, some five miles south of the 1st Battalion's roadblock. At the same time, the 22d Division and the 1st Provisional Tank Group were to launch an attack south along the Kamaing Road over the Jambu Bum ridge (see map 5).

The movement of the 5307th began on 12 March. Rugged terrain and delaying actions by the Japanese slowed the advance of the 1st Battalion. Not until early 28 March did the force establish a roadblock just below Shaduzup. At this point, they were some ten miles south of the 22d Division's lead elements. Fighting was heavy throughout the day, with the Japanese using artillery to support repeated infantry assaults. During the night, the 113th Regiment moved in to relieve the 1st Battalion from its roadblock responsibility. On 29 March, the battalion moved a mile to the northeast to rest near a mobile hospital unit. In action on the Kamaing Road, the battalion had lost eight men killed and thirty-five wounded.[52]

Merrill's instructions to the 1st Battalion were to rejoin the main body of the 5307th after its mission was completed. Accordingly, on 30 March, the battalion began to backtrack north to Janpan. Its orders were to make this march in easy stages because the route was difficult. In one area, a day's march of ten hours yielded only one mile of progress.[53]



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 179

Map 5

On 1 April, the importance of long-distance communication for the 5307th was demonstrated when a sack of grain being dropped from a supply plane fell on the 1st Battalion's only long-range radio and put it out of operation. On 3 April, after two days out of contact with his headquarters, the battalion commander felt so uneasy that he decided to go to Shaduzup and find out what was happening. Using the Chinese radio net there, he learned that the 2d and 3d Battalions were in desperate straits at Hsamshingyang and Nhpum Ga and received orders to move to that location as rapidly as possible to render assistance.[54]

The difficulty now facing the 5307th had been caused by Stilwell's decision to divide the force in an attempt to accelerate the destruction of the 18th Division. When planning for this operation had begun, Merrill and Sun Li-jen, the 38th Division commander, had advocated keeping all of the 5307th and the 113th Regiment together to establish a single roadblock at Shaduzup. Stilwell, however, wanted two

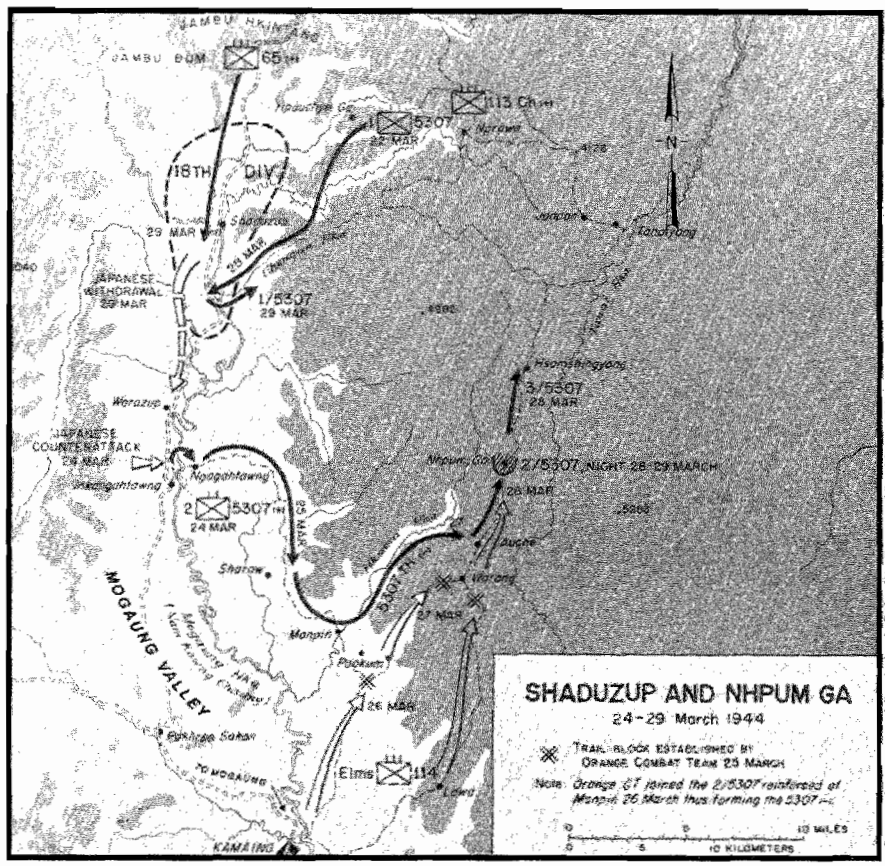


General Stilwell and Major General Sun Li-jen at Sun's headquarters. Colonel Edward J. McNally, the U.S. liaison officer with Sun's division, is seated at left

roadblocks, one at Shaduzup and a second one ten miles farther south in the Inkangahtawng area. He believed that a force making a wide swing around the right flank of the Japanese could make a deep penetration without being detected. His concept, then, was to have two simultaneous attacks on the Kamaing Road while the 22d Division attacked on the Jambu Bum front. It was assumed that, with Japanese attention divided three ways, it would be impossible for them to mount a coherent defense. It was also assumed that soon after the 2d and 3d Battalions established their roadblock, the 113th Regiment, moving down from Shaduzup, would make contact with them.[55]

Simultaneity in these attacks, however, was not achieved. During the night of 22 March, Stilwell sent a radio message to Merrill: "Japs withdrawing down the road. Jambu Bum fell today. Come fast now."[56] On 23 March, Merrill responded by ordering the 2d and 3d Battalions to rush forward. While these two units reached the Kamaing Road thirty-six hours earlier than originally planned, the 1st Battalion had fallen far behind schedule because of the rough terrain and was still four days from Shaduzup. Nevertheless, due to Stilwell's message, the 2d Battalion, after reaching the area north of Inkangahtawng early on the morning of 24 March, proceeded to attack the village. If the Chinese had moved south from Jambu Bum more quickly, and if the 1st Battalion roadblock had been established at this time, this attack might have been successful. But with a slow Chinese advance and no distracting roadblock at Shaduzup, the Japanese were able to concentrate their forces against the 2d and 3d Battalions. Soon, these two battalions were imperiled. The lay of the land had forced them to move into a position where they had a long, exposed left flank, and they were susceptible to being cut off. The Japanese began moving to do exactly that (see map 6).

After a day of heavy fighting that failed to take Inkangahtawng, the 2d Battalion commander decided that he had no choice but to withdraw eastward toward Manpin. As this withdrawal was taking place on 25 March, the danger presented by the reinforced Japanese battalion striking north from Kamaing became clear. If this force reached Auche before the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 5307th did, this



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 184.

Map 6

portion of the 5307th would be cut off from its route of withdrawal northward to Nhpum Ga. To slow the Japanese advance, two platoons were sent to block the two trails running north from Kamaing. These units successfully fought a series of delaying actions on 26, 27, and 28 March that allowed the main body to pass through Auche on the 27th and 28th.

With the 2d and 3d Battalions retiring from the Kamaing Road, Stilwell decided that this was an opportune time to travel to Chungking to meet with Chiang K'ai-shek. As he flew off to China on 27 March, however, events were taking another dramatic turn. A Japanese sketch showing their intention to continue moving north



Damaged M3A3 tanks south of the Jambu Bum heights

through Auche to threaten the left flank of the 22d Division was brought into Stilwell's headquarters. Since the Japanese could not be allowed to complete this maneuver, the 2d and 3d Battalions were ordered to stop them.

In response to this order, Merrill placed the 2d Battalion on the high ground at Nhpum Ga and deployed the 3d Battalion to defend an airstrip at Hsamshingyang, some three miles to the north. This division of his force was required because Merrill had over 100 wounded who needed to be evacuated by air and the Nhpum Ga heights dominated the airstrip.[57] The 3d Battalion was also to provide a reserve force and be responsible for keeping the trail between Hsamshingyang and Nhpum Ga open.

The stage was now set for one of the most difficult periods in the short history of the 5307th. The 2d Battalion had hardly finished building its defensive perimeter when the Japanese began attacking

on 28 March. This same day, Merrill suffered a heart attack and Colonel Charles N. Hunter relieved him. Then, on 31 March, the Japanese succeeded in cutting the trail between Hsamshingyang and Nhpum Ga. For more than a week, the Japanese repulsed all attempts to reopen the trail and kept the 2d Battalion isolated except for airdrops. During this time, repeated Japanese artillery barrages and infantry assaults inflicted serious casualties on the 2d Battalion. Disease, inadequate nourishment, fatigue, and stress also took their toll. On 7 April, a tired and hungry 1st Battalion arrived in Hsamshingyang after a grueling march from the Shaduzup area, and the next day they added their strength (only 250 men from the battalion were physically able to join in the effort) to another attempt by the 3d Battalion to break through to the 2d Battalion. Slight progress was made on 8 April, and then, suddenly, during the afternoon of 9 April, the Japanese withdrew. The battle had been won, but the cost to the 5307th had been high. In fighting at the attempted roadblock at Inkanghtawng, seven men had been killed and twelve wounded. The Nhpum Ga battle, moreover, resulted in fifty-two men killed and 302 wounded. In addition, seventy-seven sick soldiers were evacuated after the fighting ended.[58]

After the battle at Nhpum Ga, the 5307th was given several days' rest, and new outfits of clothing were issued. In addition, nutritious ten-in-one rations were delivered, and mail was received for the first time in two months.[59] But baths and new clothes could not alter reality; the unit was worn out:

> Terribly exhausted; suffering extensively and persistently from malaria, diarrhea, and both bacillary and amebic dysentery; beset by festering skin lesions, infected scratches and bites; depleted by 500 miles of marching on packaged rations, the Marauders were sorely stricken. They had lost 700 men killed, wounded, disabled by nonbattle injuries, and, most of all, sick. Over half of this number had been evacuated from 2d Battalion alone. Many remaining in the regiment were more or less ill, and their physical condition was too poor to respond quickly to medication and rest.[60]

Clearly, at this point, the 5307th was facing a mounting health crisis that threw the unit's ability to undertake another mission into question. Combat losses, even including the heavy losses suffered

in the fighting at Nhpum Ga, were below projected levels. Nonbattle casualties that required evacuation, however, were much higher than expected and were rising rapidly. In February and March, they totaled 200. In April, alone, they numbered 304, as the effects of the harsh battlefield conditions at Nhpum Ga began to be felt.[61] At Nhpum Ga, the 5307th had suffered because it was ordered to fight in a static defensive role for which it was neither trained nor equipped. Then the heat and diseases of tropical Burma combined to add to the unit's misery:

> The deserted villages of Hsamshingyang and Nphum Ga . . . became saturated with insect pests and disease organisms produced in decaying animals and men, foul water, and fecal wastes. Mental health, too, was imperiled for the troops on the hill . . . [as] their casualties accumulated on the spot, visible and pitiable testaments to the waste of battle and the fate that might befall the entire force. Scrub typhus appeared. Malaria recurrences flared up ominously. The diarrheas and dysenteries became rampant. Chronic disabilities took acute forms. When the siege lifted, the men nearly collapsed with exhaustion and sickness.[62]

Outwardly, the 5307th seemed to recover as it rested and received good food and good medical treatment at Hsamshingyang, but the exhaustion and illness of the soldiers could not be overcome with just a few days rest. Many, if not most, of the soldiers were beginning to suffer from malnutrition due to extended use of the K-rations that, as Hunter notes, were "a near starvation diet . . . designed to be . . . consumed only under emergency conditions when no other food could be made available."[63] Also, numerous soldiers suffered from chronic diseases that were sure to flare up again as soon as they began to experience anxiety and exert themselves. The consensus among the men of the 5307th was that the unit needed to go "into rainy-monsoon quarters somewhere to recuperate and reorganize for the next season."[64]

This was not to happen. Higher authorities wanted Myitkyina taken. Stilwell was motivated by his own deep desire to take the airfield and the town before the onset of the summer rainy season. The JCS had also made their position clear: the minimum objective in north Burma was "the seizing and holding of Myitkyina this dry season."[65] Furthermore, developments within the coalition at the

strategic-political and operational levels were putting pressure on Stilwell to act. Since the tactical situation and the nature of the forces under his command meant that Myitkyina could only be reached and attacked by a task force led by the 5307th, the die was cast. The 5307th would be ordered to undertake a third mission.

The pressure to take Myitkyina that Stilwell felt from the coalition partners was the result of new British and Chinese support for his north Burma campaign. Because that support was in large measure a response to U.S. pressure, he knew that he could not slacken his efforts. When Boatner had met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 18 February while on his mission to Washington for Stilwell, Roosevelt had expressed his frustration about the situation in Burma. He had told Boatner that he was more dissatisfied with the progress of the war there than in any other place.[66] In response, Boatner had urged the president to ask the British and Chinese to be more aggressive in Burma. This the president did. He expressed his views to Churchill, and in a letter delivered to Chiang K'ai-shek on 20 March, FDR diplomatically praised the accomplishments of the Ledo Force while asking for action by the Y-Force to take advantage of the Japanese dispersal:

> Your Chinese Corps on the Ledo Road has administered a serious setback to the Japanese with heavy losses to the enemy in men and also in ground and prestige. It is a magnificent outfit. General Stilwell was able to employ the United States regiment to considerable advantage and altogether the heavy reverse administered to the crack Eighteenth Japanese Division represents an important victory. . . .
>
> I am communicating my views to you at length and in considerable detail in the hope that you will give orders to the commander of your Yunnan force to cooperate in developing what appears to be a great opportunity. I send my very warm regards. Signed Roosevelt.[67]

Chiang K'ai-shek responded to Roosevelt's letter on 27 March, the day before he met with Stilwell in Chungking. In his reply, he again expressed his regrets about conditions in China that made it impossible to send the Y-Force into Burma, but he did make a major concession, saying, "I have . . . decided to dispatch to India by air as many troops in Yunnan as can be spared in order to reinforce the

troops in Ledo, thus enabling the latter to carry on their task of defeating the enemy."[68]

This letter did not satisfy President Roosevelt. On 3 April, he sent Chiang a more strongly worded message about the need to send the Y-Force into action immediately. Roosevelt stated plainly that the United States had been training and equipping the Yoke Force for just such an opportunity and that, if it did not move now, this effort could not be justified. On 10 April, Marshall followed up this message with a message to Stilwell telling him to stop lend-lease shipments to the Y-Force. To forestall this move, on 14 April, the Chinese agreed to order an offensive by the Y-Force into Burma.[69]

In mid-April, therefore, Stilwell knew that President Roosevelt had personally intervened with Churchill and Chiang K'ai-shek to gain more support for his campaign. He also had received the benefits of that intervention. During his meetings in Chungking on 28 and 29 March, the Chinese had agreed to send two divisions, the 50th and the 14th, to north Burma. Then, roughly two weeks later, they had agreed to send the Y-Force into Burma. If, after all of this had been accomplished, Stilwell did nothing, he would be wasting Roosevelt's efforts and embarrassing the president in front of the Chinese. Stilwell also felt that he would be squandering the support he had been receiving from the British, especially General Slim.

The British support was extremely important because of the major Japanese offensive into eastern India that had been launched on 8 March, just two days after Stilwell and Mountbatten had met to settle their misunderstandings. The offensive had been anticipated, but its strength had not. Three Japanese divisions advanced to surround Imphal and Kohima, and by the beginning of April, it seemed possible that the Japanese might cut the lines of communication supporting both Stilwell's forces and the airfields used to fly supplies into China. Stilwell had recognized the seriousness of the threat and, after returning from Chungking, had decided to offer General Slim the use of his 38th Division—even though he knew that this would mean the end of his advance and all hope of reaching Myitkyina before the monsoon rains came. But to his great surprise and relief, when he had

met with Slim, Mountbatten, and Major General W. D. A. Lentaigne (Brigadier Wingate's successor) at Jorhat, India, on 3 April, to discuss the situation, the British had stood firmly behind him. Slim had told him that he could keep the 38th Division and also the two new Chinese divisions that were arriving.[70] Slim had also guaranteed that any possible interruption of the line of communication to Ledo would not exceed ten days and that the LRPGs (nicknamed "Chindits") flown into central Burma in early March would continue to support Stilwell's campaign in the north instead of shifting their attention to the west.[71]

At the Jorhat meeting, Slim and Stilwell also discussed the possibility of reaching Myitkyina ahead of the rains. Since Slim was leaving him in control of the three CAI divisions—the 22d, 30th, and 38th; the two new divisions, the 14th and the 50th; and Galahad—Stilwell was optimistic that he still could do it. On 3 March, when Slim had visited Stilwell's headquarters at the start of the operation to take Maingkwan and Walawbum, Stilwell had told him about his idea for a rapid thrust across the Kumon Range to approach Myitkyina from the north. Whether or not he could actually do it, Stilwell said, depended on how things went and when he captured Shaduzup.[72] Shaduzup was taken on 29 March. On 3 April, with his force of more than five divisions left intact, Stilwell told Slim that he expected to be in Myitkyina about 20 May.[73]

Originally, when Stilwell had taken field command of the CAI in December, his vision of how to take Myitkyina had been for the 22d and 38th Divisions simply to advance across the Hukawng Valley, push over the Jambu Bum ridge, move down the Mogaung Valley to Mogaung, and then attack northeastward to Myitkyina. The 5307th was to aid this advance by making deep flanking movements that cut Japanese lines of communication and disrupted Japanese defenses. Stilwell also had hopes that, at some point, a Y-Force offensive would facilitate his advance by drawing Japanese forces away from north Burma. However, the slow progress of the CAI in December, January, and February—coupled with the failure of the Y-Force to move—had made it less and less likely that this plan would bring his force to Myitkyina before the rains.

Then, in February, Brigadier J. F. Bowerman, commander of the British Fort Hertz area in northern Burma, had suggested to Stilwell that a little-known pass through the Kumon Range east of Shaduzup could be used by a mobile force like Galahad to attack Myitkyina from the north.[74] This idea had appealed to Stilwell because it offered the chance to make up for lost time. Not only could he break free from the slow pace of CAI movement, his force could outflank the Japanese forces defending the Mogaung Valley and achieve surprise at Myitkyina. This was the plan that Stilwell discussed with Slim on 3 March and again on 3 April. This is what Slim knew Stilwell intended to do when Slim told him on 3 April to "push on for Myitkyina as hard as he could go."[75]

By mid-April, Stilwell was confident that a deep strike by a Galahad-led force could reach Myitkyina. Studies of the terrain and trail network indicated that a task force could cross the Kumon Range. The new Chinese divisions, moreover, would soon be available. The airlift of the 50th Division into Maingkwan was almost completed, and the 14th Division was assembling at airfields in Yunnan.[76] The only major question remaining before intitiating the operation, already code-named End Run, was the condition of the 5307th after the battle at Nhpum Ga.

To determine the status of the 5307th, Stilwell sent his G3, Colonel Henry L. Kinnison, to Hsamshingyang shortly after the fighting ended to see firsthand how the men looked. Kinnison told Hunter about Stilwell's intention to organize a task force to go over the Kumon Range and approach Myitkyina from the north, and the two of them, as Hunter recalls, "discussed the condition of the men and animals in detail."[77] During this time, Hunter apparently did not object to sending the 5307th on this mission. In his memoirs, he only notes that he asked for "one week's rest before leaving Hsamshingyang."[78] Merrill, too, did not object to the mission. Perhaps both he and Hunter believed taking Myitkyina justified additional sacrifice on the part of the 5307th. Maybe they felt that objections were futile because of Stilwell's views that will power could overcome some of the debilitating effects of tropical diseases, and that soft-hearted medical officers were probably contributing to the high evacuation

rate for illness in the 5307th.[79] In any case, when Stilwell told Merrill that he knew he was asking Galahad for more effort than could fairly be expected of it and that he had no other option but to do so,[80] he left Merrill with no basis to oppose the operation.

Stilwell had no choice but to use the 5307th to execute End Run because the nature of the forces he commanded made it necessary for Americans to lead the Myitkyina task force. The Chinese were not trained for long-distance cross-country maneuver through the jungle. They also lacked the aggressiveness for such an undertaking. Moreover, any attempt by Stilwell to send a Chinese force alone against Myitkyina would certainly have been opposed by Chiang K'ai-shek as being too risky. Another problem was that a Chinese force would have required Kachin guides, but the Kachins did not like the Chinese. Slim notes that in the retreat from Burma in April–May 1942, the Chinese troops fleeing north through the Mogaung and Hukawng Valleys had looted villages with "no law and little mercy."[81] As a result, in Ogburn's words, "The Kachins disliked and feared the Chinese at least as much as the Japanese."[82] To ensure full, effective participation by the Chinese and the Kachins, the force moving on Myitkyina had to be a combined force under American command.

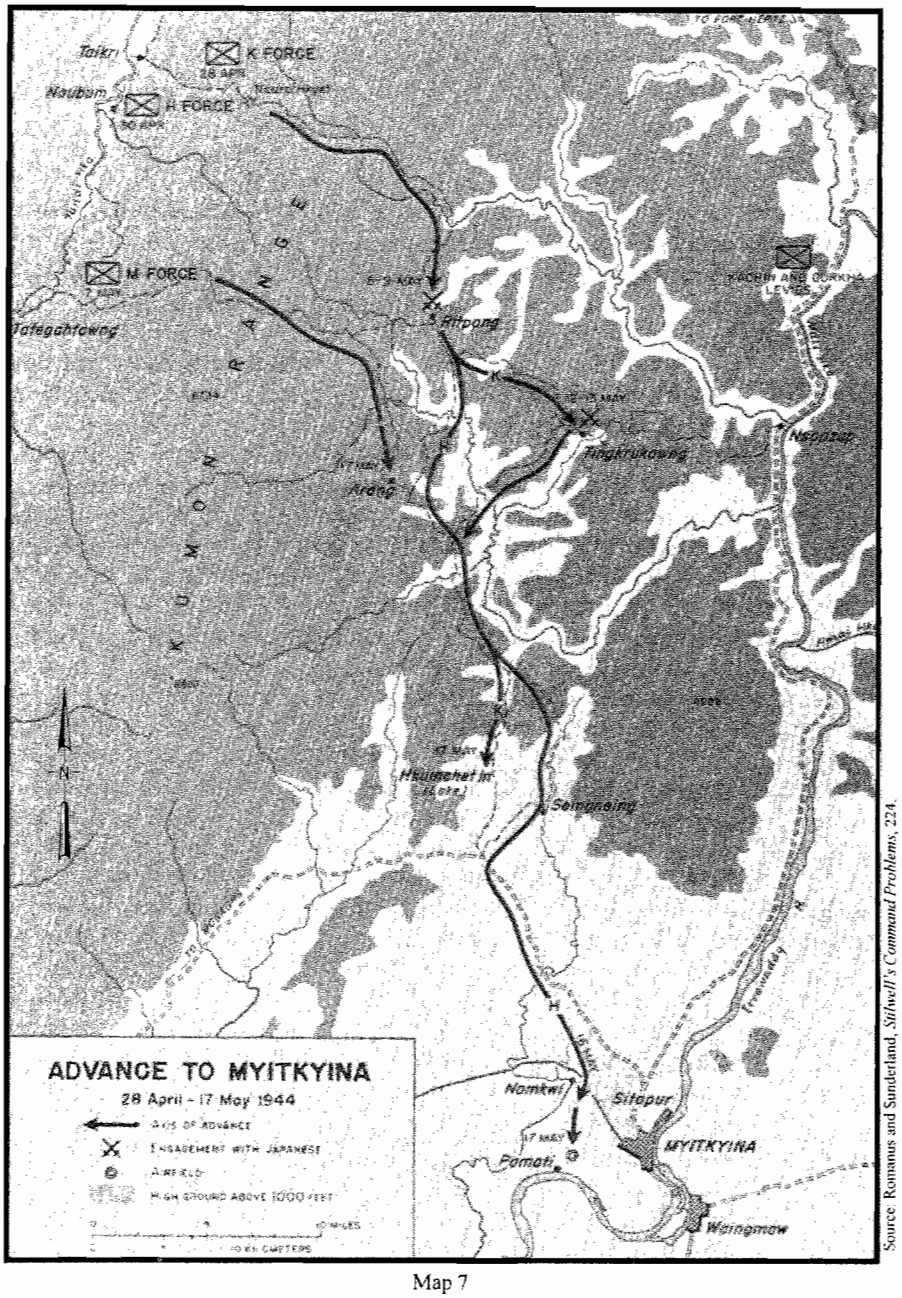
On 17 April, two days after the 50th Division had completed its move from Yunnan to Maingkwan, Stilwell met with his staff and Merrill to discuss the plan. On 21 April, Stilwell set up the task force to seize Myitkyina. Because the 5307th had lost approximately 50 percent of its strength and was down to about 1,400 men, it needed to be augmented by Chinese and Kachin soldiers. Three combat teams commanded by Americans were created, and Merrill was given overall command. H Force, under Hunter, contained the 1st Battalion of Galahad, the 150th Regiment of the 50th Division, the 3d Company of the Animal Transport Regiment, and a battery of 22d Division artillery. K Force, under Colonel Kinnison, contained the 3d Battalion of Galahad and the 88th Regiment of the 30th Division. M Force, under Colonel McGee (2d Battalion commander), contained the 2d Battalion of Galahad and 300 Kachins.[83]

On 22 April, two days short of the full week of rest that Hunter had requested,[84] the 5307th left Hsamshingyang and began the twenty-mile march north to Naubum.[85] There, the battalions set about organizing the combat teams and preparing for the operation. On 28 April, K Force moved out. H Force followed two days later. On 7 May, M Force started on its way (see map 7).

Despite their illnesses and fatigue, the soldiers of the 5307th set out for Myitkyina in fairly high spirits. When they had first heard of this mission, they had been filled with disbelief and resentment. They had felt that Stilwell's headquarters "was either ignorant of the shape [the unit was] in or indifferent to it—or out of its mind."[86] However, their outlook improved after they were promised that, after capturing the Myitkyina airstrip, they would be relieved and flown to a rest and recreation area.[87] As Ogburn states, "We had it from General Merrill himself that . . . we would be . . . given a party to cause taxpayers a shudder . . . and given furloughs."[88] This vision gave them the will to see this new mission through.



Troops of Merrill's Marauders resting on a mountain trail



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 224.

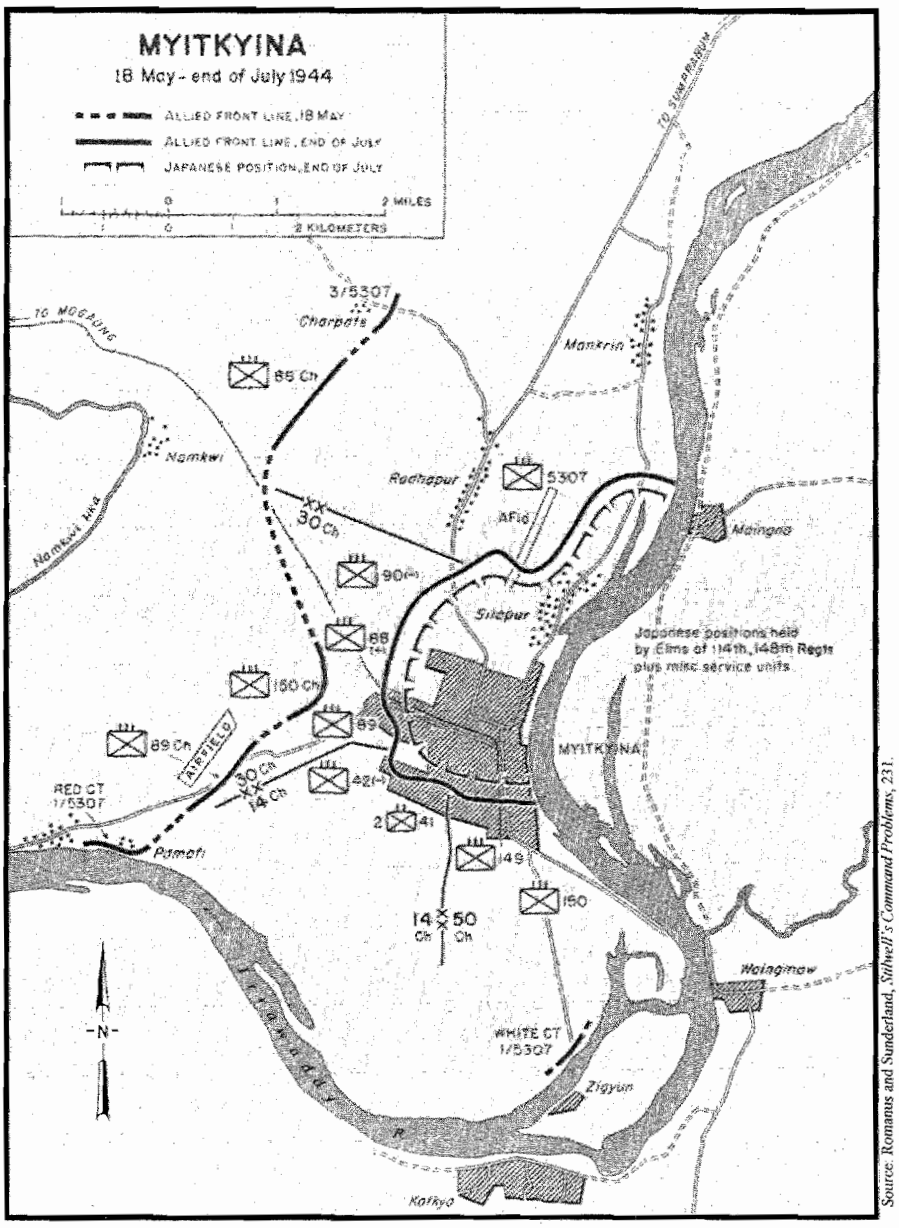
Map 7

The hard reality of the march—the rain, the mud, the steep narrow trails where exhausted animals slipped and fell down mountain sides carrying their precious loads with them, the effects of disease and malnutrition, and the attacks of insects and leeches—all of these things soon began to sap the soldiers' will. The conditions were far more difficult than any of them had encountered previously, and many soldiers had to be evacuated because they were too sick and weak to continue. At some points, groups of men were left behind with the promise that help would be sent. Yet most of the troops did manage to keep moving forward, and on 17 May, H Force attacked and captured the main Myitkyina airfield.

The men of the 5307th thought that this victory meant they would be released from their hardship, but—despite the earlier promises—it was not to be. Again, tactical necessity and the nature of combined operations made it impossible to relieve them. Instead of being flown out, they were committed to a positional battle against a growing Japanese force that was vigorously defending the town of Myitkyina and threatening to recapture the airfield. As explained by Boatner later, Stilwell felt that he had to keep Galahad at Myitkyina for four reasons:

> 1. GALAHAD was the only U.S. combat unit in the theater available for the assault on Myitkyina.
>
> 2. The Chinese 88th and 150th Regiments that marched over the Kumon Range with GALAHAD had few evacuations for sickness/fatigue in spite of their heavy casualties.
>
> 3. Since early May Stilwell had been resisting heavy pressure to evacuate 3d Indian Division [Lentaigne's LRPG Chindit force].
>
> 4. The Japanese lines were only 1,500 yards from the airstrip which was the only base and source of supply.[89] (see map 8.)

Reason four expresses Stillwell's tactical need to keep the 5307th at Myitkyina and reflects the simple requirement to have sufficient soldiers in Myitkyina to handle the Japanese. This was a growing requirement as Japanese strength increased. After 21 May, Stilwell was even forced to pull two battalions of Army engineers off Ledo Road construction work and rush them to Myitkyina as reinforce-



Source: Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 231.

Map 8

ments.[90] In addition,ssued to try toúhaps increase, t personnel at î, a directive was issued to hold the number of sick and fatigued soldiers being evacuated down to an absolute minimum.[91] Second, staff officers in the rear were ordered to comb their areas for earlier Galahad evacuees and send as many as possible back to the unit.[92] At this time, there was no possibility of relieving the 5307th. The situation demanded that the unit stay in the fight.

Coalition warfare and the nature of combined operations were also making relief of the 5307th out of the question. The 5307th was the only U.S. combat unit in the theater. This gave it a symbolic significance beyond the combat power that its soldiers could generate. Stilwell wanted the Chinese to continue fighting, and he wanted the units of the Indian 3d Division (Wingate's-Lentaigne's Chindits) that were withdrawing northward toward Mogaung and Myitkyina to hold their ground. To achieve these goals, he needed the presence of the 5307th on the battle line. Facing a classic problem inherent in combined operations, Stilwell was determined not to "let the impression be created that [he was] withholding U.S. troops from combat in a sector where as an Allied commander [he] was keeping British and Chinese troops in combat."[93]

Keeping the 5307th in Myitkyina was, therefore, Stilwell's way of addressing a fundamental problem of combined operations—maintaining teamwork and trust and keeping all forces united in their efforts. The 1993 edition of FM 100-5, *Operations,* states clearly that, in combined operations, "missions should be perceived as appropriate and achievable for the forces to which they are given and equitable in terms of burden and risk sharing."[94] The key phrase here is "equitable in terms of burden and risk sharing," for in combined operations, the surest way to create discord is to create the impression that the units of one nation are being favored in some way over the units of another. When units of one nation are under the command of an officer from a different country, the danger of such impressions being formed is especially high. This is why FM 100-5, *Operations,* states that "national contingents normally retain command of their own forces."[95] Stilwell, an American, was commander of the CAI, and since 17 May, the Chindits had also been attached to his com-

mand. As the combined force commander, he certainly did not want to be seen as playing favorites with the 5307th.

Stilwell's situation was already delicate because of high Chinese casualties and a feeling among the Chinese that their tasks were more difficult than those assigned to the 5307th. Lieutenant General Zheng Dongguo, who had been sent to India to command the CAI in the field if Stilwell did not, felt that the Chinese were being given the hardest and most dangerous missions, and that the Americans were looking for something that could be taken easily. Then, when the Americans got in trouble, as they did at Walawbum, they would call on the Chinese for help.[96] He Junheng, deputy division commander and chief of staff of the 38th Division, had the same complaint.[97] Certainly, in terms of combat casualties, the Chinese were paying a heavier price than the Americans. By 15 April, Chinese casualties in north Burma were as follows: 22d Division, 800 men killed and 2,000 men wounded; and 38th Division, 650 men killed and 1,450 men wounded.[98] Reflecting the heavy fighting around Myitkyina, the 150th Regiment of the 50th Division by 20 May had taken 671 battle casualties.[99] Boatner was well aware of Chinese concerns and felt embarrassed in his dealings with the Chinese because of the 5307th's withdrawals from its roadblocks.[100] Under these circumstances, withdrawing the 5307th from Myitkyina and sending it back to India would undoubtedly have harmed the combined force's sense of unity.

Chinese attitudes were also a concern for Stilwell as he dealt with Lentaigne's requests to allow the Chindits to withdraw quickly to the north. The Chindits were wearing out just like the 5307th was, and Lentaigne felt that they were no longer fit for service. But Stilwell worried about what would happen to Chinese morale if troops who had only entered combat in March passed through their lines on the way to India.[101] Also, following close behind the Chindits were Japanese moving northward. If the Chindits did not hold their blocking positions south of Mogaung, these Japanese units would move north to fight against the 38th and 22d Divisions in the Mogaung Valley and reinforce the Japanese at Myitkyina. Thus, Stilwell refused Lentaigne's request and ordered him to hold the

Japanese well south of Mogaung. Stilwell's answer to statements about the greatly weakened physical condition of the Chindits was to respond that the 5307th had been through as much, if not more, and was still in the field.

This, then, was Stilwell's solution to the problem of equitable burden sharing. Every nation's units were to suffer equally. Looking at the 5307th's experience from this perspective, it can be realized that the unit was not sacrificed, as Colonel Hunter charged, to satisfy Stilwell's ego. It just happened that it was the only American combat unit available, and the combined force that Stilwell commanded needed American participation. Stilwell had, as he told General Merrill, no choice but to ask Galahad for more than could normally be expected of it. Without Galahad to help hold up the coalition banner of shared suffering, the combined force would have lacked a crucial unifying element and a catalyst for action.

Fatigue, disease, malnourishment, and the stress of battle continued to weaken Stilwell's soldiers. Added to this was the feeling by the members of the unit that they had been lied to and abused—an impression that spread through the unit after the men learned that they were going to be kept at Myitkyina. Morale fell precipitately and, with it, the men's physical well-being. Shortly after the 5307th had reached Myitkyina, the regimental and battalion surgeons had recommended that the entire unit be withdrawn because of its wretched physical condition.[102] For the reasons discussed above, this advice was not heeded. The directive to hold down medical evacuations and efforts to beat down fevers with medication led to no improvement. During the last two weeks of May, evacuations due to illness ran about 75–100 per day, with a peak day of 134.[103] Steadily, the unit faded away. By 30 May, the 2d Battalion, which had started off for Myitkyina with 27 officers and 537 men, had only 12 men left in action.[104] The situation in the 3d Battalion was about the same. Only the 1st Battalion still had some strength—a handful of officers and 200 men.[105] In his diary entry for this day, Stilwell was forced to write, "Galahad is just shot."[106]

At this time, the 5307th truly was nonoperational, but it was to continue in existence for two more months. On 25 May, 2,500 Galahad "replacements" landed in Bombay, India, and were rushed to Myitkyina as quickly as possible. In early June, these soldiers and the remnants of the 5307th were organized into one "old" Galahad battalion and two "new" Galahad battalions. With the two engineer battalions that on 8 June were grouped into a provisional regiment, they maintained the American presence in what was now the siege of Myitkyina. But the "new" Galahad was not the "old" Galahad and never really could be. That force had experienced something special and accomplished something extraordinary. It was fitting, therefore, that after Myitkyina fell, the 5307th was disbanded. The fate of the organization thus mirrored what had happened to virtually all of the men who had served with it. In the campaign to reach and take the strategic objective of Myitkyina, they had reached the limit of what they could do and could do no more.

There is much to be gained by examining the experiences of the 5307th. The soldiers established an inspirational standard of endurance and courage in the face of an extremely harsh natural environment and a dedicated foe. The unit's long cross-country movements illustrate the innovative use of the new capabilities given military forces at the time by advances in communications technology and aerial resupply techniques. But no lessons to be learned are greater than those related to the conduct of combined or multinational operations. If, as Colonel Hunter asserts, "Galahad Force was the most beat upon . . . regimental-sized unit that participated in World War II,"[107] the reason for this happening is to be found most of all in the combined nature of the northern Burma campaign. As the only American combat unit within the combined force, Galahad could not avoid being given the special burdens that came from being Americans. Their presence was required to form viable multinational task forces when the units of other countries could not or would not work together alone. Their participation in operations was necessary to encourage the units of other nations to stay in the struggle and to fight hard. The 5307th was the means by which the American field commander, General Stilwell, showed that he was not asking more

of his coalition partners than he was asking of American soldiers. What was especially damaging to the 5307th was that it was a small unit and the only U.S. combat unit under Stilwell's command. It had to bear America's fighting burden alone. Eventually, and perhaps inevitably, it collapsed under the weight of its combined load.

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9. Ibid., 182.

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20. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, 117.

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26. Hunter, *Galahad*, 10.

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28. Ibid., 12.

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39. Ibid., 152.

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44. Ogburn, *The Marauders*, 103.

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46. Hunter, *Galahad*, 58.

47. Ogburn, *The Marauders*, 105.

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57. Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 183.

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68. Message, Chiang K'ai-shek to Roosevelt, 27 March 1944, in Sunderland and Romanus, *Stilwell's Personal File*, 1557–58.

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72. Ibid., 255.

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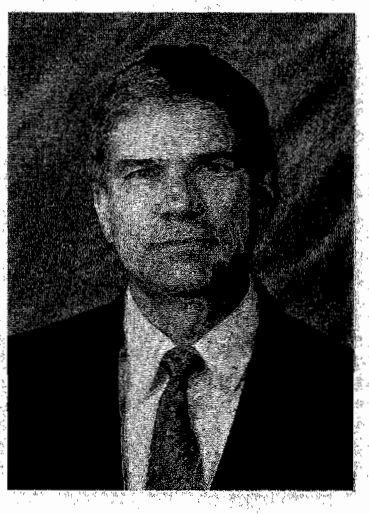
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*U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1996-415-127/60163



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