

1942 - 43

The fighting in Arakan from 1942 - 45 has been adequately described in the British and Indian Official Histories; there are also (I believe) Japanese accounts. But other events in the area during this period are not without interest, and particularly what happened in North Arakan in 1942 and 1943: the reactions of the inhabitants of a remote part of Burma when the sudden collapse of the British administration in March 1942, and the failure of the Japanese forces (two officers and a few BLA) to advance beyond Akyab, left them to their own devices after nearly 120 years of colonial rule: the bitter and bloody struggles between the Chittagonian Muslims ("CFs") and the Arakanese Buddhists ("Mughhs"); the Peace Committees, their actions and interactions (I read incidentally there are Peace Committees in Bangla Desh): the efforts to re-establish British civil control at a moment of great military weakness: the setting up of the British Military Administration and the problems it faced, political, economic, financial - and military.

I had always hoped that Brigadier Phelips, who knows more than anyone else about "Phelipstan", was going, one day, to set down his reminiscences. But he now tells me that he does not feel inclined to (despite Yoga) but does not mind if someone else does. I expect to retire in the autumn of 1972 and if no one else volunteers for the job propose to try and fill the gap. I do not project anything very complex - a narrative of perhaps twenty to thirty thousand words with a map and a poetical annex, in an edition of about fifty or sixty copies for circulation to anyone who was there, and for presentation to libraries in the UK and Burma.

I can do nothing - not even collect material - in my present job in West Africa; but I am sending copies of this circular to everyone I can think of who might be interested or able to help. I shall be very grateful indeed for any help or advice, for personal reminiscences or diaries (or transcripts), for suggestions on where I can find relevant material and for names and addresses of others who might help, or who might like to have a copy of the result, if there is one. I shall be most grateful for letters, but please do not send me any material at present.

V Force in Arakan was so closely linked in so many ways with The Military Administration in Arakan that those who served with it there in the early days will almost certainly be able to contribute useful material. But I have lost touch with most of them. Brigadier Lucas Phillips has just published a book on V Force in Arakan, "The Raiders of Arakan", which I have not yet seen, but which seems to deal mainly with the later period. Tony Irwin wrote a book about his experiences in the Admin Box (which I have, but not here) but I don't know of any others.



Abidjan, Ivory Coast
1 November 1971

Peter Murray

Explanatory Preface

In February 1943 I was released from the Burma RNVR, to which I had been lent by my Service, the Burma Civil Service (Class I) in 1940, and posted to the British Military Administration of North Arakan (the BMANA or Mily Admin, as it was usually called). I arrived in Maungdaw on 10 March and was told by the Military Administrator, Lt.Col. (later Brigadier) D C P Phelps, OBE, that I was to join John McTurk, the Deputy Military Administrator, Buthidaung, at Buthidaung, and eventually to take over as DMA Rathedaung when that area was recovered (it never was while I was in ~~Rathedaung~~ Arakan). While waiting at Maungdaw for transport I read a file of Phelps' reports to Eastern Army HQ at Barrackpore (Calcutta). I found his accounts of the situation he found when he arrived in Maungdaw in September 1942, and of what had happened in the area after the collapse of the British administration in March - April 1942, quite fascinating. I always hoped he would write something about it all himself; but he has steadfastly refused to do so, and when I retired in the early seventies I decided to see if I could do something myself. I got in touch with everyone I knew who had been in the area at the time, and searched the files in the India Office Library and the Public Record Office; but after some time reached the reluctant conclusion that there really was not enough material available to write a reasonable account, especially since all my material, with one small exception, was from the British and CF* side.

2. I can find no Eastern Army papers in London, and the Historical Section of the Defence Ministry in New Delhi told me that they have nothing from Eastern Army except a few rather scanty War Diaries. Phelps' reports seem therefore to have been destroyed (I have found one or two references in other files, but the reports themselves were clearly not sent on).

3. There is very little that is relevant in the Burma Office files. I was not allowed to see Sir R Dorman-Smith's private files (Governor of Burma 1940-46); I asked him, but he insisted that there was nothing relevant in them - "Dickie Mountbatten dealt with all that." But Lord Mountbatten was not appointed SACSEA until September 1943.

4. I wrote twice to the Burma Historical Commission to ask if there was any account of the period from the Burmese or Arakanese side, but never had a reply. When I asked U Tun Aung Chein, who is I understand a historian, at the Britain-Burma Society party on October 2nd, 1980, he referred me to Mr Taylor of the SOAS !

5. A A Shah, ICS, was Subdivisional Officer Cox's Bazar in 1942; he visited Maungdaw and Buthidaung with a British journalist (William Munday of the News Chronicle) in July 1942, and in August 1942 accompanied Denis Phelps to Maungdaw; he remained as "Adviser on Muslim Affairs to the Military Administrator" until March 1943. I had great hopes, as I had known him in England when we were both doing our cadet training in 1937-38; but he had died in Karachi about 1971. As a high-born Muslim and a

* CF (feminine CK) was the common abbreviation for the Bengali (Chittagonian) Muslims of North Arakan used by the BMA(NA) in conversation - and by English-speaking CFs themselves.

noted orator in Urdu, he was of great assistance to Phelps' mission. I tried to find if he had left any diaries or papers about his time in North Arakan, but with no success.

6. A possible source I never tried is the Bangladesh Government, or the History Department of Dacca University, if there is one. There was a good deal of talk during the war of transferring the Muslim areas of North Arakan, primarily the Maungdaw Township and the northern part of the Buthidaung Township, to the Chittagong Division of India (later Pakistan, now Bangladesh), though I do not think it was ever seriously considered at a high level, and there was certainly never any sort of official commitment. I was myself much in favour of it at the time, since I felt we (the British) owed a great debt to the CFs; not only had their refusal to cooperate with the Japanese probably saved India from a Japanese invasion in 1942, at a time of great military weakness and acute political unrest, but they provided something like a quarter of the man-power of the British Merchant Navy during the War, and suffered heavy losses. In 1977-78 the Burmese drove 150,000 or more CFs across the border into Bangladesh, claiming that they were illegal immigrants; Bangladesh complained to the U.N. and eventually they were allowed back. Earlier, the Bangladesh Military Attache in Rangoon was accused of being in touch with the Arkanese (not CF) Liberation Army and declared persona non grata. In view of all this, it seems likely that the Bangladeshis have studied the history of the Chittagong - Arakan border area.

7. A number of British officers were in or near North Arakan in 1942, and some of them are probably still alive. Had I got further with my researches, I might have tried to locate them through the press.

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8. Before I gave up I drafted a short account of what I had been able to find out about the period that mainly interested me (March to September 1942) with a brief introduction giving the background (historical and geographical, mainly from the Akyab District Gazetteer, 1917) and a short account of the subsequent history of the area. I have now revised this to make it more comprehensible to the general reader.

9. My main sources are

(a) a transcript of a taped conversation Murray - Phelps, April 1975, with Phelps' own marginal notes

(b) ditto conversation Murray - Orr (CB Orr, Indian Police, who was in North Arakan on intelligence work 1942-43, with some further notes by Orr; (April 1975)

(c) note by U Kyaw Min JCS of his visit to Buthidaung in early May 1942 to bring out his family (my only non-British source)

(c) Long note by G L Merrells, BCS(I), who was in N Arakan 1942-43 and again later.

(d) Two private letters from L F Edgerley, CBE, Burma Forest Service, who was also in Arakan 1942-43; these contain one or two useful points.

I have also several notebooks with extracts from ICL and PRO files, but they are hardly intelligible to anyone else. Also a typed transcript of my own Arakan diary, February 1943 to July 1944, but it is not really relevant.

10. Printed Sources: The only book I know of which refers to this period in Arakan and the Military Administration is

British Military Administration in ~~Siam~~ the Far East 1943-6 by F S V Donnison, CBE, ICS, London HMSO 1956 (Official History of the Second World War): pp 17-32.

The British and Indian/Pakistani Official Military Histories make no reference to either:

The War Against Japan: Volume II: London HMSO 1958
ditto Volume III: - 1962

Indian Armed Forces in World War II: The Arakan Operations 1942-45: Combined Inter-Services Historical Section (India and Pakistan) 1954.

11. Other books which deal with Arakan in World War II are

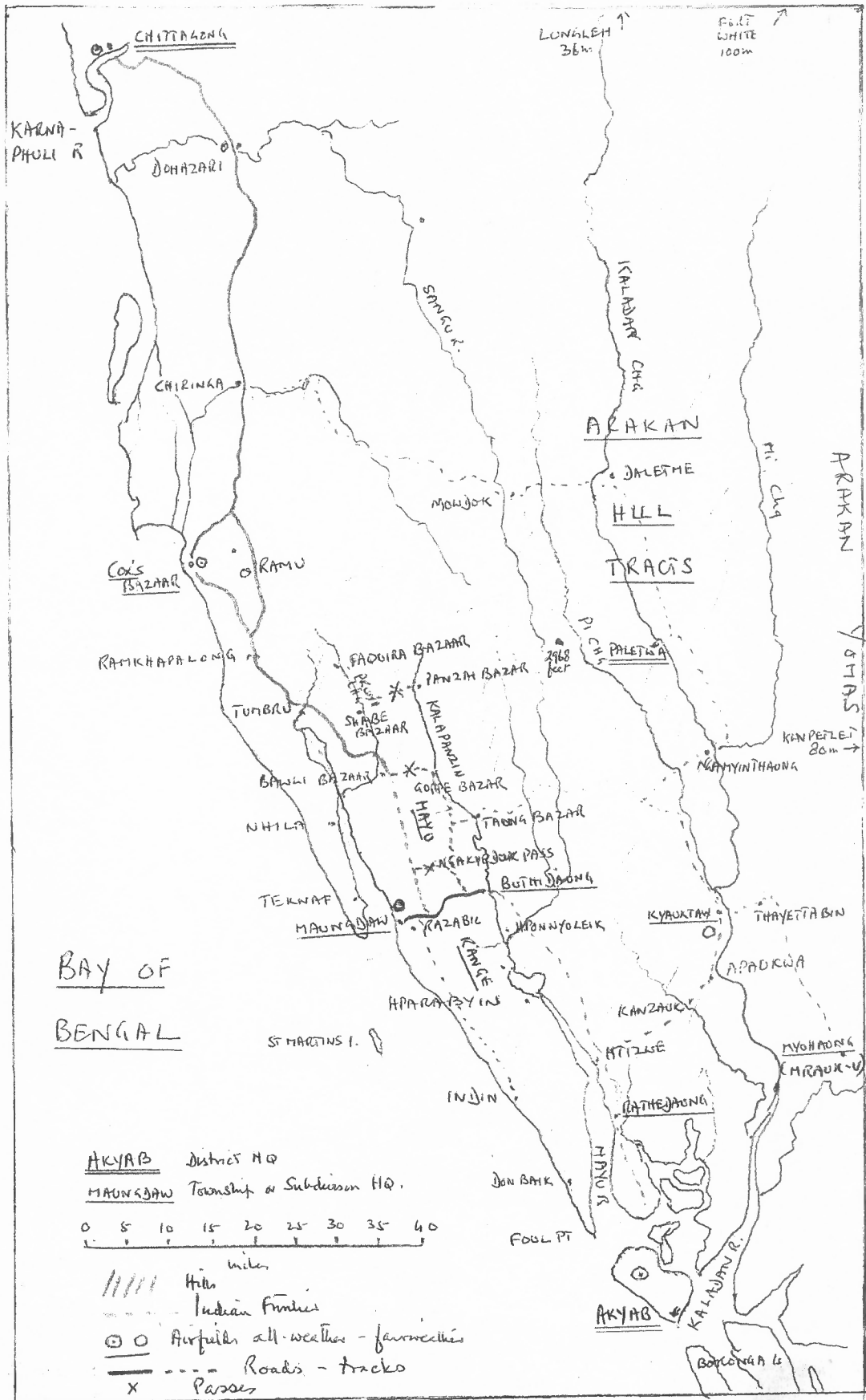
Jungle Diary by A M S Irwin (Thacker & Spink, Calcutta, 1944). Tony Irwin, the son of General Irwin, Commander of Eastern Army in 1942, served with V-Force in N Arakan in 1943-4 and was in the Sinzweya battle (the "Admin Box") in February 1944. Although his account contains much of interest, it is grossly overwritten and factually unreliable; many of the adventures he claims to have had happened to other people

The Raiders of Arakan by C E Lucas-Phillips: London, Heibemann, 1971. Well and vividly written up from the diaries of Dennis Holmes, a regular soldier who served with V-Force in 1943-44. Paints a pretty good picture of V-Force work, but does not bear on 1942.

12. One more book on Arakan:

The Land of the Great Image, by Maurice Collis: Faber & Faber, London 1943. A written-up version of the diaries of Friar Manrique, a Portuguese who lived in Chittagong in the early 17th century and visited the Court of Arakan at Mrauk-U. Collis, though a very doubtful character who was all but dismissed from the ICS in Burma, was an excellent writer who wrote a number of most readable books on Burma. He knew Arakan, and this book gives a good picture of the country and its people.

Peter Murray
Haslemere, 26 October 1980.



NORTH ARAKAN - SKETCH MAP

North Arakan in 1942.

Background

Arakan is the land lying between the Bay of Bengal and the watershed of the Arakan Yoma, the range that bounds the Irrawaddy Valley - Burma proper - on the west. The hills are covered with bamboo and scrub jungle and the alluvial valley floors are rich paddy-land. The average minimum and maximum temperatures are 74 - 86 degrees F.; the monsoon rainfall is well over 200 inches and the whole area is highly malarious. It is so broken up by hills, rivers and creeks that land communications, particularly during the south-west monsoon (May to October), have always been difficult.

2. The Arakanese people are closely related to the Burmese and speak a dialect of the Burmese language. They seem to have arrived in Arakan from the north-east about the 7th or 8th century A.D. Like the Burmese they are now plain-dwellers: the hillmen are Chins and (in the north-west) Mros (Mrungs) and Khamweyis (Kumis), who are proto-Burmese. Owing to their geographical proximity the Arakanese have been more ^{directly} influenced by Indian culture than the Burmese, and there seems to have been some admixture of Indian blood, but they have remained Theravada Buddhists, like the Burmese.

3. Arakan was part of the Burmese Pagan Empire (11th to 13th centuries A.D.) but in the 16th and 17th centuries was a strong independent minor kingdom, holding the whole eastern shore of Bay of Bengal up to the mouth of the Meghna River, north of Chittagong. But in 1766 the Mughal Empire from Bengal recovered Chittagong; and in 1784 King Bodawpaya of Burma attacked and conquered Arakan and removed to Mandalay the great Mahamuni statue of Buddha, the country's palladium, and supposed to have been made by Buddha himself. Arakan thereafter became a Burmese province, with its boundary roughly along the Naaf River. Many Arakanese refugees from Burmese rule fled across the Naaf and settled in what was then becoming British India. This led to trouble in the early 19th century; the Arakanese refugees raided across the Naaf, and the Burmese crossed the Naaf in pursuit of the culprits. This was one of the causes of the First Anglo-Burmese War, after which Arakan was annexed to the British Crown (1826) and became a rather sleepy backwater between India and Burma.

4. North Arakan, the northern part of the Akyab District, falls roughly into four parts, corresponding to the administrative divisions:

(a) the Maungdaw township: the valley of the Pruma and Naaf Rivers, bounded by the Naaf River and the Bay of Bengal on the west and the Mayu Range, a broken band of hills about 5-10m wide and up to 2000 feet high, running roughly from north to south, on the east.

(b) the Buthidaung township: the valley of the Mayu River, called the Kalapanzin above Buthidaung, which falls into the sea north of Akyab Island, bounded on the west by the Mayu Range and on the east by a band of broken hill country 20-30m wide, separating it from

(c) the Kyauktaw Township; the ~~xx~~ lower valley of the Kaladan ~~Yaxi~~ River, which falls into the sea south of Akyab Island: the east of the township ~~was~~ is a wide stretch of hill country running up to the Arakan Yoma

(d) north of the Kyauktaw Township were the ARAKAN HILL TRACTS, administrative headquarters Paletwa, an area of thinly-peopled and lightly administered country on the upper waters of the Kaladan and Pi Rivers.

5. This note is concerned primarily with the history of the Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships in 1942, with a brief reference to their later history: and an even briefer reference to the Kyauktaw Township and the Arakan Hill Tracts.

6. The Chittagonian Muslims in Arakan. After the 1826 annexation, Chittagonian Muslims in increasing numbers trickled down from the overcrowded areas of S E Bengal into the relatively empty rice-paddies of N Arakan. Being frugal, hard-working and fertile, they increased steadily; many came by sea to Maungdaw or Akyab for temporary work, ploughing or harvesting, and then stayed. Arakanese landlords preferred them as workers and tenants; and (as in Burma proper) the grantees* imported them wholesale. All through the 19th and early 20th century there were occasional racial clashes between the CFs and the poorer Arakanese, but the infiltration continued, and by 1931, the last census for which details are available (for 1941 we have only totals), the position was as follows:

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Arakanese</u>	<u>Indians</u>	<u>Indo-Burmans</u> **
Arakan	1,008,535	638,372	217,801	57,952
Akyab Dist.	637,580	327,872	210,990	49,715

1941 totals:

Arakan	1,186,738	(+ 18% over 1931)
Akyab Dist	760,705	(+ 19% over 1931)

This shows that by 1931 they formed nearly a third of the population of Akyab District, and they were certainly a much higher proportion in the areas nearest the Indian frontier, the north of the Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships.

7. 1942. The Japanese attacked Burma in December 1941 and bombed Rangoon on the 23rd and 25th. Most of the population fled from the city and the Indians or many of them tried to make their way back to India overland. They began to reach Arakan early in 1942; and the trickle increased to a flood with the steady British withdrawal,

* Grants were long leases of vacant land at low rents made by the Government of Burma on condition that the land was brought into cultivation within a certain period. The grantees usually imported Indians as labourers or sub-tenants, and most of them did very well out of the system. The Burmese hated it and abolished it soon after independence.

** Indo-Burmans included both Arakanese Muslims (Chittagonian father and Arakanese mother) and Maghs (Arakanese father, Chittagonian mother). The offspring normally followed their father's religion. The Arakanese Muslims were by far the more numerous. In Chittagong (and in the BMANA) Nagh was used to mean Arakanese generally.

14? and Japanese air bombing. Rangoon was denied to civilians on 21 February and evacuated on 7 March. Sandoway, the southern district of Arakan, was evacuated on 25 March, and the Commissioner of Akyab (R P Abigail) left with his non-Burmese staff on 30 March (his action was much criticized later). Kyaukpyu, the district to the south, was evacuated on 5 April, and about the same time the Deputy Commissioner of Akyab moved to Buthidaung (see para 9 below).

8. By late March Akyab was deserted by its population; the RAF had left the airstrip and the garrison, a battalion of the Rajputana Rifles, were almost completely demoralised; many had deserted and headed north back to India, selling their rifles on the way. The Royal Indian Navy left after the sinking of the sloop HMIS Indus by Japanese bombing; but the Commodore Burma Coast (Commodore Cosmo Graham, CB) with the Burma RNVR patrolling the creeks, stayed on until 3 May, and then withdrew to Calcutta. The Japanese forces, consisting (I was told at the time) of a motley collection of Burma National Army (BNA) led by two Japanese officers, occupied Akyab, but did not go north of it for some time.

9. After the Commissioner's departure, the Deputy Commissioner of Akyab, Kyaw Khine, himself an Arakanese, moved the District Headquarters to Buthidaung, together with the Treasury, which contained some Rs. 2.3 crores (£1.725m)*. He was accompanied by a number of prominent Arakanese and their families - officials, landowners and merchants - who were evidently more frightened of the Japanese than of the Chittagonians. For some weeks Kyaw Khine did what he could to keep the peace and maintain the administration; but everywhere law and order was dissolving into bitter and bloody fighting between CF and Magh, provoked by long-standing racial and religious discords and fuelled by simple greed for loot. In the areas nearest the Indian border, the Maungdaw Township down to near Foul Point and the Buthidaung Township to about 20m south of Buthidaung, the Maghs were killed or driven out (except for small groups in Maungdaw and Buthidaung towns, which had always been predominantly Magh); all Buddhist buildings, pagodas and monasteries, were rased or burnt, and all Magh villages burnt and all Magh property (mainly cattle) seized. Similarly, further south, all or nearly all CFs were killed or driven out, mosques destroyed and CF cattle seized.

10. At the beginning of May Kyaw Khine took his launch down the Mayu and up a side creek to a village called Gudampara** to investigate a report of Muslims massing.

* Another account says Rs 23 lakhs (£172,500), but the DC had called in the contents of other Treasuries before moving, and the higher figure seems more likely to me.

** I cannot find this village on any map; but the maps give only the Burmese names of villages. This was a continual difficulty during the war: for example Paung-daw-byin-ywa-thit (Burmese: new-village-by-the-grove-of-reeds) would be pronounced in Arakanese Paung-daw-brahn-rwa-sat; but the CFs called it Naya-para (new village).

to attack Buthidaung. As he approached the bank, flying a white flag, he was killed by a single shot. The launch returned to Buthidaung and his body was kept on board for some time, to prevent a panic in the town when his death became known. Just after the murder U Kyaw Min, a senior Arakanese officer of the ICS who had flown to India from Upper Burma, arrived in Buthidaung from Calcutta via Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar and Maungdaw, where he found some 9000 Arakanese under the protection of a small (Gurkha) detachment of the Assam Rifles, under a young British officer. He found his family, whom he had come to rescue, and brought them back to Maungdaw, where he helped to organize the evacuation of the Arakanese refugees across the Naaf River to the west (Indian) shore, where there were several large Arakanese villages dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century, using the small steamer NHILA, which had brought him down from Cox's Bazar.

11. It must have been quite soon after this that a party of BNA from Akyab arrived in Buthidaung. They opened the Treasury and distributed its contents to the poor and needy - no doubt including themselves*. Some of them went over to Maungdaw, now entirely in CF hands, and tried to persuade the CFs there to support the Japanese, with promises of local autonomy; but with no success at all.

12. Two further incidents - if they are two different incidents - must have happened soon after the BNA visit, while Buthidaung was still held by the Arakanese. A launch overturned in the river by the Buthidaung jetty, drowning a number of Arakanese women and children who were trying to get to Akyab; and a British V-Force officer, "Argentine" Jones, with a party of CFs, attacked and sank a steamer at the Buthidaung jetty (I can only remember one sunken steamer at Buthidaung in early 1943; but the launch may have been a relatively small craft which overturned and disappeared in the mud).

13. The final assault on Buthidaung was organized by Maracan and Omra Meah (see paras (a) and (b) below); after five days bitter fighting the Arakanese who remained were killed, or fled, and the CFs had the whole border area to themselves. Sharp divisions at once arose, however, between the followers of Omra Meah and of Maracan over the division of the spoils of the town; and earlier grandiose dreams of a combined jihad down the Mayu to take Akyab for Islam dissolved in smoke.

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14. I am now (I hope) in a position to deal with the central theme of this note: the history of the Chittagonian Muslims of North Arakan (CFs) from about March to about October 1942. The Chittagonians are physically unprepossessing and have - or had - a reputation as liars and cowards, which is entirely unjustified. After spending most of 1943 and 1944 in the CF area I have greatest admiration for their tenacity, their toughness, their uncomplaining acceptance of hardship and suffering, their intense loyalty to their families and to their religion and - with few exceptions - to the British cause during the war. From this last they reaped very

little ^{ultimate} advantage.

15. In 1942 the CFs had been under British administration, minimal, even-handed and rather dull, for 116 years, and had on the whole prospered, mainly as rice farmers; though many Chittagonians took to the sea in the British merchant service and particularly in the two great companies that provided most of the inland water transport in Burma, the Irrawaddy Flotilla and the Arakan Flotilla, not many seem to have taken to this occupation from North Arakan (I at least met very few). Suddenly, in a few weeks, the "iron frame" of the British administration vanished, and the CFs were left on their own to face numerous problems - first and foremost that of their hereditary enemies the Arakanese, a problem which they tackled with vigour and courage and had disposed of by the end of May on the lines I have described. Next, their own personal and inter-village, or inter-area, quarrels; and finally the economic problems caused by the sudden cutting of communications with their natural centre and market, Akyab. These last were in the event never serious; enterprising CF traders made their way with goods between Chittagong and N. Arakan all the time, and later the Army improved road communications. The other problem, of law and order and inter-village relations, was approached by the setting up of "Peace Committees", some with more splendid titles.*. **

16. In Maungdaw township there were, from south to north,

(a) the Majlis-i-Shura, run from Lambaguna, on the track running south along the foothills, about 10 miles from Maungdaw town, by E D S Maracan, MBE, MLC, and covering the whole south of the township down to near Foul Point. Maracan was a wealthy and well-educated Burma Indian of Chulia (Madras) origins, whose family had been settled in Burma for several generations; the family had stevedoring interests in Akyab, one brother was a well-known race-horse owner in Rangoon, and they owned a great deal of land south of Maungdaw. Maracan had been a member of the Legislative Council (appointed I think) and aspired to be the leader of the Indian community in Arakan. He seems to have seen the war as an opportunity to make himself the Rajah of North Arakan. He set himself up in great state at Lambaguna, with a courthouse where justice was administered, and public floggings inflicted; a police force, armed with rifles bought from the deserting Akyab garrison; a herd of four or five hundred cattle, taken from deserted Arakanese villages; and a

* "Peace Committees" were also set up in East Bengal during the Bangladesh independence struggle.

** For most of the following paragraphs I have had to depend on the rather hazy recollections, many years after, of a few British officers who reached the area later in 1942 and were generally much too busy to occupy themselves with historical research. I have an account of his visit to Buthidaung by U Kyaw Min (para 10 above); and A A Shah, the SDO Cox's Bazar (~~see para below~~) visited Maungdaw and Buthidaung in July with William Munday of the London "News Chronicle", whose account is limited in value by his ~~ignorance of~~ ^{total unfamiliarity with} local condi

sort of court consisting of his son Ali Ahmed (I believe by a Cf mother), who had a reputation for honesty and piety and who was later employed by the BMA; his son-in-law Mohamed Sulaiman, a great rascal; a Parsee named Sorabji; and Gomez, a Goanese Sub-assistant Surgeon. In the early days at least his influence extended over the hills into Buthidaung, and it was almost certainly some of his men who were responsible to the murder of Kyaw Khine. But from the beginning he was at odds with

(b) the Maungdaw Central Peace Committee, led by Master Omra Meah, a schoolmaster of about 30, and a considerable personality, who emerged as the local leader after the evacuation of the Arakanese (and I presume the remaining officials) across the Naaf at the beginning of ~~XXXXXX~~ May. Omra Meah kept less state than Maracan; he established a colourable copy of the old administration, with a court and a police station, and even collected some revenue (rents from land abandoned by the Maghs); but he had considerable ambitions and was at daggers drawn with Maracan over the boundary between their respective jurisdictions. Other members of the Peace Committee were Munif Khan, a former Asst. Township Officer, and Nur Ahmed, who had been a clerk of the Akyab District Court.

(c) At Bawli Bazaar, about 20 miles north of Maungdaw on the south bank of the Pruma Chaung, was ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Tanmfaxxaixixian another Peace Committee, led by Faruq Ahmed, B Sc, though the real power was it seems his father, Amir Ali Mir, a wealthy landowner and grantee (whose family had received a grant in the early days of the British occupation for services rendered during the First Burmese War). Faruq Ahmed was not a warrior; he had a rival who was, but whose name had been lost.

(d) At Shabe Bazar (or Sahib Bazar), about 10 miles further up the Pruma from Bawli, was the grandiloquently named Anjuman Tahufazzal Islam under Mohamed Luqman, a schoolmaster; and finally, right at the top of the valley

(e) At Faquira Bazar was another Peace Committee which later merged with (d). Both these last were remote from the war and gave very little trouble.

17. We know much less about the Buthidaung Township during this period (how I regret not having spent more time in historical enquiry during the monsoon of 1943 at Taung Bazar and Goppe Bazar). There were (later at least) strong headmen at Panzai Bazar, at the top of the Halapanzin Valley (Abdul or Abdus Salaam) and at Kyaungdaung. At Taung Bazar, some ten miles north of Buthidaung, the schoolmaster Abdul Bari, the "Master Sahib", was a moulvi of great influence. Two or three miles further south, at Bogrichaung, was Abdul Bari Choudhury, the "Langra Rajah" ("lame Rajah" - he was paralysed from the waist down), a landowner with a good deal of prestige. In Buthidaung there was a Peace Committee, but no strong leader - the town I think had been more Arakanese in population than Maungdaw. To the south, on the east bank of the Mayu River, about half way between Buthidaung and Rathedaung, was the bandit Faruq, an enterprising

robber with a gang of followers, who built himself a mud-walled fortress (some said, with a moat and a drawbridge) and tyrannized over the local villagers and traffic on the river. His modus operandi was to sally out and drive all the local cattle he could collect into his stronghold, and then charge a ransom for their return. Great efforts were made later to persuade him to cooperate with the Mily Admin, but to no avail. He was eventually captured, tried and shot by the Army, *Toward the end of 1942.*

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18. There are a few scraps of information on the 1942 interregnum to add. On the Maungdaw side, Maracan made determined efforts to extend his sway over Maungdaw and even (I remember being told) made overtures to the Bawli Bazar Peace Committee for a concerted attack - presumably offering a share of the loot. There was a good deal of minor scrapping along the "frontiers" and in September Faruq Ahmed's rival in Bawli Bazar mounted an attack on Maungdaw which Omra Meah repelled without difficulty; he captured the leader and Phelips, who was by then in Maungdaw, persuaded him to hand him over, and sent him back to India.

19. Beside the visit from the BNA in May (para 11), there seems to have been a later visit ~~from~~ to Maungdaw from some CFs who had remained in Akyab. It was led by a pleader named (?) Sultan Ahmed and was no doubt sponsored by the Japanese. The deputation was entertained to dinner and then massacred, all except one who managed to escape and drive his car through a CF road-block and so to Buthidaung.

20. On the Buthidaung side, the only other incident of which any memory survives was an Arakanese attack on Taung Bazar, the date of which is uncertain. A well-armed party of Arakanese crossed by the track through the hills from Kyauktaw in the Kaladan Valley, probably towards the end of the monsoon in October - there was certainly a considerable influx of refugees from the Kalapanzin into the Pruma valley about then - and made a great slaughter. The CFs certainly had the worst of it; when I was there in 1943 they were reluctant to talk about it, and gave the impression that it had happened much earlier. Perhaps it did, and perhaps it was a reprisal for the taking of Buthidaung; but if so the crossing of the hills during the monsoon was quite a feat.

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Kyauktaw and the Kaladan Valley.

21. This area was never part of "Phelipstan", as the Mily Admin area was called. There were never as many CFs there as further west; a considerable number were massacred at Kyauktaw about April 1942, and by the end of the year only a few thousand were left out of an estimated 40,000. At the end of 1942 a detachment of the Baluch Regiment led by Col. Souter ("Soutcol") crossed the hills from Taung Bazar to Kyauktaw (I believe by the same track as the Arakanese had used earlier (see para 20)); they had a V-force officer with them, but no civil officer. Their role was to guard the left flank of the British advance down the Mayu,

and to keep law and order. They had great difficulty in maintaining contact with the local population, and when Phelps, at the request of the Army, flew to Kyauktaw in February 1943 to consider the feasibility of establishing a civil administration, he was most unfavourably impressed. U Aung Tha Gyaw, an Arakanese Sessions Judge who was with Phelps in Maungdaw, later went over and brought out some CP refugees; and soon afterwards the Japanese advance forced the Paluchis to withdraw.

22. A further abortive attempt to recover control of the Kaladan Valley was made at the end of 1943, when 81 West African Division advanced across the hills from Chiringa via Mowdoke, supplied by air. They had a Civil Affairs Officer (J M Russell) for part of the time, but did not get much beyond Kyauktaw. They withdrew across the hills to Taung Bazar in April 1944.

The Arakan Hill Tracts

23. When the British officers withdrew from Paletwa across the hills in April 1942 (or thereabouts) the Civil Surgeon, Dr Kyaw Zan, an Arakanese of a bold and cheerful disposition, remained, and did what he could to keep the administration going and preserve the few Indians there from slaughter. The Japanese summoned him to Akyab in June, but he managed to convince them of his bona fides, and they sent him back. At the end of 1942 a detachment of the Tripura Rifles ("Tripforce") led by Col. Hollington-Sawyer* made their way over the hills to Daletme and down to Paletwa, where they were welcomed with open arms by Dr Kyaw Zan, and linked up with the Paluchis in Kyauktaw. They had with them Stephen de Glanville, of the Burma Frontier Service, who also made several unavailing efforts to get the Mily Admin to take over the A.H.T. There was some trouble with the Indian troops, who (as usual) treated the local inhabitants as defeated enemies; and the party withdrew in April. Dr Kyaw Zan went with them, and most of the remaining Indians were killed after they left. Kyaw Zan was decorated by the Governor of Burma and later returned to the Mily Admin in the Kalapanzin.

24. At the end of 1943 81 W.A.Div. passed through Paletwa on their way down the Kaladan, again with de Glanville, who did what he could to alleviate the shortages the hill-people were suffering, particularly of salt. But he had to withdraw in April 1944.

* A young officer with Tripforce later told me that no one could understand why Col. H.S. had been sent on this mission. He was an employee of Steel Bros in Rangoon, the rice department, and a keen Volunteer; he claimed to have been with the International Brigade in Spain. He took 40 coolie loads of baggage with him to Paletwa, including his golf-clubs and plenty of alcohol. He recommended all his officers for MCs, though ~~xxx~~ they hardly saw a Japanese.

"Phelipstan" - a Postscript.

25. Donnison (op.cit.) has given some account of the British Military Administration of North Arakan, but I believe it may be worth attempting a slightly fuller account, at least of its beginnings. In August 1942 the situation of the British in India was precarious, both from the civil and the military viewpoint. If the Japanese had pushed north, Chittagong was to be evacuated and a defence line established along the Brahmaputra. A "V-Force" organization was set up in the central area (Manipur & the Naga Hills - British officers organising locals to provide enemy intelligence) and extended to Arakan; V-Force officers were operating there from June onwards, based on the western (Indian) bank of the Naaf. Col. Calvert (not the famous "Mad Mike" but a Bengal landowner) was in charge, with Captains Howard, Robey, Jones and possibly others.

26. The story current in Calcutta in August 1942 was that the Government of India had offered to take over the administration of the unoccupied area of North Arakan, whereupon the Government of Burma hastily arranged to send someone down there (there were Indian troops in Maungdaw early in May, cf para 10 above; and A A Shah, the Subdivisional Officer of Cox's Bazar, had visited Maungdaw and Buthidaung in July; he had a British journalist with him, and his visit therefore attracted some publicity, which perhaps gave rise to the story).

27. It is true that the Governor of Burma, then at Simla, asked Denis Phelps (D C P Phelps, CBE, ICS, formerly Defence Secretary to the Govt of Burma; he was decorated for his work as Liaison Officer with Burma Corps during the 1942 retreat, but not for his much more important and distinguished work in N. Arakan) to go down to N Arakan on a reconnaissance.

28. The Army were finding V-Force invaluable as a source of intelligence on the enemy's forward dispositions - indeed, at the time it was almost the only source. But in many areas, and particularly in N Arakan, V-Force work was hampered by the absence of any other British presence. When Phelps paid a courtesy call at Army HQ in New Delhi on his way to Arakan, he was welcomed with open arms, told he had a job, instructed to report to General Irwin (Eastern Army) and General Slim (XV Indian Corps) at Barrackpore, commissioned as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Indian Army, strictly forbidden to communicate with the Government of Burma (though they were expected to continue to pay him: typical of the illogical attitude of the Army towards the civil administration at this time, cf Donnison, op.cit.) and hastened forward to Comilla (General Lloyd, 14 Indian Division) and Chittagong (123 Brigade: Lancashire Fusiliers (LFs) and 1/15 Punjab Regiment).

29. From Chittagong Phelps took the ferry to Cox's Bazar, where there was a detachment of the LFs, and from there walked south down the beach with Col. Calvert of V-Force and some LFs, then over the hill to Taungbro (Tumbru) in Burma, on the Naaf, where they met A.A.Shah, the Muslim ICS Subdivisional Officer of Cox's Bazar, and Capt. Robey of V-Force. The LFs re-

returned from Tumburu and Phelps went down the Naaf by boat with the others to Maungdaw (1 September 1942). Phelps at once set to work negotiating with Omra Meah and Maracan, and very soon, mainly by force of his own personality, but helped by Shah's Urdu eloquence, the money he had brought with him and the ingrained habit of British authority.

established a measure of control

30. The subsequent history of N Arakan is pretty well covered elsewhere, but may be briefly summarized. In October 1942 the Japanese at last moved north and occupied Buthidaung and Maungdaw. Phelps and V-Force had to withdraw hastily across the Naaf with two platoons of the Punjabis, who had arrived at the end of September. Meanwhile, further back, preparations for the First Arakan Campaign were going ahead. The advance began on 20 December 1942 and the Japanese retreated to Foul Point, just north of Akyab, without a fight. There followed a considerable expansion of the Military Administration, and at one time it had 16 or more British officers (all ex-Burma). The First Arakan Campaign was a failure, and by mid-May 1943 the Japanese were back in Buthidaung and Maungdaw. The Mily Admin, which had been formally incorporated in the newly-formed Civil Affairs Service (Burma), was reduced during the 1943 monsoon to Phelps (now a Brigadier) at Lawli Bazar, and one other British officer (Murray) at Coppe Bazar on the Kalapanzin. During the 1943-44 open season the fighting was inconclusive; 81 West African Division advanced down the Kaladan; the Japanese in February stifled a planned British offensive at birth by a well-executed surprise attack on Taung Bazar, but failed to overwhelm 7 Indian Division as they had planned and were heavily defeated at Sinzweya (the "Battle of the Admin: Box"- the first ~~time~~ major defeat inflicted on the Japanese by British forces, and a turning point in the war). Soon after this two British divisions were flown from Arakan to the Imphal front, where the main Japanese attack on India was developing, and the two sides settled down for the monsoon with the British in Maungdaw and the Japanese in Buthidaung.

31. Meanwhile communications were improved, supplies were built up and training carried out. In November the Indian forces moved forward down the Mayu peninsula and river, while 81 and 82 West African Divisions advanced into and down the Kaladan Valley against desperate but minor Japanese resistance. Akyab was taken on 3 January 1945, and the war left the CF area behind.

32. The Military Administration's main tasks were

(a) to organize the local population to help the British forces with labour and supplies; and (through V-Force) with intelligence;

(b) to keep them from hindering the Army's operations; and

(c) - and last - to do what was possible to help them in the shockingly difficult circumstances of the time.

* * * * *

1945 and After

32. In 1945 peace of a sort returned to N Arakan, and in October the area returned to civil administration, like most of the rest of Burma (that is, Government officers went to their offices one day with military rank badges, and the next day without them). I do not know exactly what happened between the CFs and Maghs, but I gather that many Maghs returned to their old villages, and there was no move to alter the boundary. Mr Jinnah, the creator of Pakistan, refused to back CF claims to Maungdaw township. As Burma moved towards independence (4 January 1948) the few remaining British officers left and were replaced by Burmese or Arakanese, and the CFs found themselves in the position of the other minorities in Burma (Indians, Chinese, Shans, Karens, Chins, Kachins, Nagas - even the Arakanese themselves) who had previously relied on the British to protect them from the Burmese majority. It is evident that the Burmese officials viewed the CFs with suspicion, dislike and hostility; and in turn the CFs had quite lost their pre-war meekness, and were quite prepared to protect themselves. Around 1950 the CFs were in open rebellion, and among the leaders of the Mujahids, as they called themselves, were Omra Meah and Abdul Salaam of Panzai Bazar. The rebellion grumbled on; in 1961 U Nu, the Prime Minister, could only claim that the Mujahids only numbered 140. At the same time an Arakanese - anti-Burmese - Liberation Party (legal) and Army (illegal) was active, with the aim of making Arakan an autonomous province. However, when the Army under General Ne Win took power in 1962, all these rebellions were vigorously dealt with. However, early in 1978 four leaders of the Arakanese Liberation Army, who had been captured, were tried and executed; two of them were accused of treasonable correspondence with the Military Attaché of the Bangladesh Embassy in Rangoon, who was declared persona non grata.

33. In 1977 the Burmese set on foot a vigorous check of the CFs in N Arakan, as a result of which some 167,000 fled into Bangladesh. The Burmese claimed that they were illegal immigrants rightfully deported, the refugees themselves and the Bangladeshis (who had to house them in refugee camps) that they were Burmese citizens unjustly driven out*. On 19 May 1978 Bangladesh appealed to the United Nations. After prolonged negotiations in Rangoon and Dacca, the Burmese gave way and agreed to take the refugees back, or most of them.

* It seems likely that the truth lay somewhere between. The CFs are used to moving to and fro freely across the ill-defined frontier, which runs for the most part through jungle-covered hills. But (see para 6 above) there were over 200,000 Indians, of whom the vast majority were CFs, in Akyab District in 1931.



**THIS IS A TRUE STORY OF 1930s
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AND OF THE POSTWAR MALAYAN
EMERGENCY, AS EXPERIENCED BY AN
EXTRAORDINARY MAN.**

Boris Hembry went out to Malaya as a rubber planter in 1930 to work on estates in Malaya and Sumatra. Following the Japanese invasion in December 1941 he volunteered for Freddy Spencer Chapman's covert Stay Behind Party and spent a month in the jungle behind enemy lines before escaping by sampans across the Malacca Strait to Sumatra. Hembry returned to Singapore shortly before its surrender then escaped to Java and subsequently to India, where he joined V Force, a clandestine intelligence unit operating in Burma.

In 1943 Hembry was recruited into the Secret Intelligence Service – given the bland cover name Inter-Services Liaison Department (ISLID) – and returned to Sumatra and Malaya several times by submarine on intelligence-gathering missions. He became Head of Malayan Country Section ISLID in 1944, liaised with Force 136, and was responsible for the most successful intelligence coup of the Malayan war.

After WWII, Hembry returned to planting at Sungei Sipit, Perak, where the murder of three colleagues on 16 June 1948 signalled the start of the Malayan Emergency. Assuming the leadership of the local planting community, he formed the first Home Guard unit in Malaya, was an early proponent of squatter control (later incorporated into the Briggs Plan), served on district, state and federal security committees, and survived several attempts on his life.

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SPYMASTER



BORIS HEMBRY MALAYAN SPYMASTER

MEMOIRS OF A RUBBER PLANTER,
BANDIT FIGHTER AND SPY

across the chaung to ask him. But it occurred to me that this might be some form of initiative test, which, if failed, would mean my being RTUed (returned to unit), and I did not relish the idea of serving with the 4/3 Madras Regiment at Barrackpore for the duration.

We tried keeping the ferry broadside to the bank, but the horse could not or would not mount the craft and turn 90 degrees at the same time. Every time we got its forelegs on to the craft it drifted away from the bank and we would all end up in the chaung, and neither the ferryman nor I was strong enough to hold the punt steady. So I got the boatman to wade into the water and ram the punt end-on into the muddy bank. That way we got some stability whilst I coaxed the horse to embark. He gave every impression of having done it before, because, in spite of the boat rocking during the crossing, he remained calm. And all the time it continued to bucket down. The whole operation took well over two hours. When I reached the dak bungalow I thankfully handed the horse over to the dak wallah to dry off and feed and climbed the stairs soaked through, covered in mud from head to toe, and in a vile temper which I made no effort to disguise. But I swear I saw a glint of amusement in Felix-Bill's eye when he thanked me and passed over the bottle of Scotch.

The rain had stopped during the night and the weather was hot and steamy. We made an early start and arrived at Bawli Bazaar at midday. Felix-Bill introduced me to my commanding officer and those officers in camp. The CO was Lieutenant Colonel Archie Donald, well over six feet in height, as hard as nails and utterly fearless – the winner of two King's Police Medals for gallantry. Frank Bullen was a Malayan policeman, a Scot of frightening aspect with a red beard, who wore crossed cartridge belts like a Mexican bandit, hard drinking and hard swearing. He was seldom in camp and so I saw very little of him. Then there was Lieutenant Gretton Foster, a farmer's son from Coggeshall, in Essex. As I knew the area well, we had much in common and became firm friends. We spent many an evening talking about home, mutual acquaintances and, above all, the birds. The group was completed by a former Burma Forestry Service officer, and a doctor.

Donald had been in the Burma Police for many years, most of

the time in Arakan, so knew the whole area and its various tribes and languages intimately. He wore a bush shirt, always outside his shorts, socks and chaplis (Pathan sandals), 1914–18 ribbons, was armed with revolver and kukri, always carried a broken polo stick, and topped it all with an old-fashioned khaki pith helmet. He had a hooked nose, a fierce moustache and a bark much worse than his bite.

The first afternoon was spent listening to the Brigadier questioning Donald, and I was amazed at the colossal amount of information V Force had collected about Japanese movements, positions, units and their spy networks. I was to learn later that sometimes these were the same as ours. But we paid better. Donald's agents were everywhere and his sources of intelligence were legion. To my amusement the agents were all referred to as 'CFs' – Chittagonian Fuckers – even in official reports to Corps Headquarters.

The camp consisted of several large and well-made bashas with atap thatching. Each officer had his own bearer and the mess employed a good Maug cook. Rations were extremely generous; V Force was obviously considered a special unit judging by the 'officers' comforts' issue, for in every five gallon stores container was a bottle of Scotch. This in addition to rice, dried fruit, packets of potatoes and onions, tinned stores, tinned milk, tea and coffee and packets of cigarettes. The latest batch of containers had been badly packed, for the pungent smell of onions penetrated everything, especially the cigarettes, and one would have to be very hard up for a smoke to try one. But the CFs loved them. Compared to ordinary infantry soldiers we lived like fighting cocks.

That evening we had a sort of mess night, a little indulgence in alcohol loosened tongues, and I got to know my new companions a little better. The Brigadier told us some of his plans to extend V Force operations, and then dropped – so far as I was concerned – his bombshell. Having just completed a march of over 30 miles, in appalling conditions, I was to accompany him back to Chittagong, starting the next morning, using the same method of transport. I was very far from amused, started to remonstrate but thought better of it, so merely asked what the form was.