FORGOTTEN FRONTIER

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By

GEOFFREY TYSON

1945
W. H. TARGETT & CO., LTD.,
4, LYONS RANGE, CALCUTTA.

PRICE Rs. 8/-

PRINTED IN BRITISH INDIA BY THE TIMES OF INDIA PRESS, BOMBAY.
PUBLISHED BY W. H. TARGETT & CO., LTD., 4, LYONS RANGE, CALCUTTA.

Author's Note

Were it possible to mention by name all from whom I have received valuable help in the writing of this book, my list of acknowledgments would indeed be a long one. I must, however, say that without the comprehensive memorandum prepared by Mr. Arnold Whittaker and Mr. Henniker Heaton the following pages could never have seen the light of day. Their notes, on which I have freely drawn, were both my starting point and my guide over the wide field in which my researches have lain. In the early stages of planning this account of the tremendous but little known achievement of the tea planters and tea garden medical staffs of North-East India, I also received both documentary and personal aid from Mr. Justice H. B. L. Braund, who occupied an important post in Government's relief administration.

The events which I describe took place about three years ago and, as I was neither a participant nor a spectator, I could not have described them without the aid of some who were there. Amongst these, I am indebted to Capt. Ramsay Tainsh for allowing me access to his records of the occasion and for a first hand account of conditions in the Hukawng Valley route, of which he had extensive knowledge. Miss Nell Baker, who was in Shinbiwyang when conditions were at their worst, gave me a description of this 'charnel house,' as one authority called it at the time. There are many others who ought to find a place in this catalogue of acknowledgments. The illustrations have been selected from photographs which have come to me from all parts of India, and I am greatly obliged to Mr. F. T. H. Hearn and Mr. H. G. Owen for their help in this connection.

Finally, the reader will realise that a book of this kind could not be written without the active assistance of the industry whose doings, at a critical moment in the history of India and the Commonwealth, it attempts to chronicle. Successive chairmen, as well as officers, of the Indian Tea Association, Calcutta, have borne my importunities and delays with more grace and patience than I have had a right to expect. Throughout I have received the most generous help and encouragement from Messrs. James Jones, E. J. Nicholls and H. C. Bannerman, whilst Mr. P. J. Griffiths read over the final manuscript.

It only remains for me to add that although I am so greatly indebted to other people for the raw material of my story, I am entirely responsible for its form and content, and for such sins of omission and commission as may have unwittingly crept in.

GEOFFREY W. TYSON.

CALCUTTA, MARCH 1945.

Preface

By H. E. Field Marshal the Rt. Hon'ble Viscount Wavell of Cyrenaica and Winchester, G.C.B., G.M.S.I., G.M.I.E., C.M.G., M.C., Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

THIS is the story of the work of the Indian Tea Association in assisting the escape into India of refugees from Upper Burma during the summer of 1942. It is a tale of human suffering, human endeavour and human endurance. No large scale migration of people can surely ever have taken place in worse conditions. The vast majority of the refugees were ill-clad, and ill-equipped; the movement took place at the height of the monsoon in one of the wettest parts of the world; the country through which it was made could hardly have been more difficult. It was almost unknown, almost trackless; the thick jungle was infested with all the tropical plagues of mosquitoes, leeches, flies and similar pests; there were long steep ascents and descents; deep, swift, swollen rivers lay across the path; there were no local supplies of food available.

It is a great tribute to the work of the rescue organisation that in these conditions the percentage of mortality should have been so low, and that so many should have been guided and helped to safety.

It would not perhaps have occurred to one at first to consider that the profession of planting tea in remote and peaceful Assam was likely to engender qualities of toughness, determination and improvisation in emergencies; or that Indian Tea labour would be able to make so great a contribution to the Indian war effort. Yet there are few bodies of civilians who have a better record in this war than the tea planters of Assam. They have sent some 50% of their supervising staff to the Services; they provided and directed the labour that made a large part of our military life line into Burma, the Manipur road; they played the principal part in the rescue of the North Burma refugees, as is told in this

book; and they have continued to meet the increased world demand for tea.

Some interesting conclusions on human endurance emerge from this story. It was not always the young and the strong that came through best. One observer wrote: "The people who reached us were the toughest; not brawny youths of eighteen to twenty-five, but children, young women, middle-aged people and old folk. It was not a matter of brawn but of determination and commonsense." Other observers agreed that when matters got "down to earth" women showed more commonsense than men; they were tougher; more resourceful, calmer; and as the trek progressed appeared to acquire an increasingly domineering character. These and other observations scattered through the book will be of interest to students of human character and behaviour.

But primarily the book is a tribute to the gallantry and endurance of many people of many nations—British, Indians, Burmese, Gurkhas, Chinese; disciplined soldiers such as those of the Assam Rifles, who have such a fine record in this war, or primitive tribesmen like the Nagas or Mishmis.

It is a tale that it is well worthwhile to read, and Mr. Tyson is to be congratulated on the way he has presented it.

WAVELL

THE VICEROY'S HOUSE, NEW DELHI,
MARCH 12, 1945.

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THE VICEROY'S HOUSE,
NEW DELHI.

It has given me great pleasure to follow the conspicuous success which has attended the efforts of members of the Indian Tea Association in assisting the civil and military authorities on the frontiers of Eastern India. Their immediate and voluntary response to a situation beyond the normal resources of the civil administration, and their continued devoted service on both refugee and military projects, resulted in the saving of many thousands of lives and the achievement of an enterprise for which the refugees and all India must be grateful.

Nor do I overlook the devoted and often heroic conduct of the labourers from the tea gardens. I am aware that both planters and labourers have risked and sometimes even lost their lives in these great causes to which they set themselves. I would be glad if your Association would convey to all its members and the labourers working with them my profound gratitude for their splendid services and the selfless spirit in which they have been rendered.

Linlithgow

Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

December 15, 1942.

CHAPTER I.

TO WHAT GREEN HELL?

WHEN it is finally written the full story of world war Number Two must inevitably include some account of the great movements of civilian populations, inextricably entangled with current military operations, which occurred during the years when Axis striking power was at its height. The hurried trek across France in the face of Hitler's triumphant armies, no less than the subsequent invasion and occupation of something like four hundred thousand square miles of Russia, produced mass movements of civilian population which were carried out under conditions of which as yet we have very little accurate knowledge. But, without drawing too freely on the imagination, we can conjure up a reasonably true picture of the scene. Less known, perhaps, to the world at large is the epilogue to the loss of Burma, a story compounded of the same dark tragedy that stalked the mainland of Europe with the added difference that for thousands of British, Indian, Burman and other refugees, many of them mixed descent, escape from a ruthless and cunning enemy involved them in a struggle with the forces of Nature which must be one of the epics in the annals of human endurance. By the time they began the journey across the border mountains to India they had for the most part placed themselves out of reach of the Japanese terror. Few, however, can have realised the ordeal that lay ahead, an ordeal that was only partially mitigated by the relief columns that thrust out from several points along the Indian border, across hundreds of miles of wild, unknown and forbidding country—a veritable No Man's Land which, for a few inclement monsoon months, the swirling tide of war made for these children of the Empire an inhospitable refuge. Many perished on the journey; but without the large scale relief that was organised from India's eastern border few, except the early parties who made their way under more favourable weather and ground conditions, would have survived.

This book is written from the standpoint of one of the chief relief agencies, whose work, by general acknowledgment, contributed very largely to the success of the evacuation as a whole. I use the word 'standpoint' deliberately, because whilst the

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succeeding pages are an endeavour to place on record a comprehensive account of the relief operations carried out by the Indian Tea Association, it will be necessary to digress from time to time, to look at other parts of the several lifelines which were thrown out to the retreating victims of the Japanese occupation of Burma. A more ambitious piece of writing would, no doubt, attempt a full length, co-ordinated narrative of the whole vast undertaking for which the Government of India made itself either directly or indirectly responsible. I have been privileged to see many of the official records of the time, and I hope that in due course they will be made available to the general public, for they constitute a record of which, in spite of some mistakes and errors of judgment, the authorities have good reason to be proud. But a book which would provide a satisfactory conspectus of all that happened in connection with Eastern Frontier projects and relief in the critical period of 1942 is beyond the compass of my present task, which is directly chiefly to placing on record the role of the Indian tea industry as a whole, and particularly that part played by its planter members, upon whom to a large extent fell the actual execution of this magnificent errand of mercy. Their work lay literally in the valley of the shadow ; and if I may borrow a famous epitaph in which Edmund Blunden has immortalised the men who fought in the battle of the Somme, what the planters of Assam did day after day, week after week, and month after month ' will never be excelled in honour, unselfishness and love.' There are many more to whom these words apply with equal truth. The men of the tea industry, who worked in the camps and on the roads, know full well that these others gave themselves unsparingly to the job in hand, and it is no wish of theirs that even by implication, such outstanding devotion to their fellows should go unhonoured and unsung. But in writing a story of the kind I now essay, an author must set himself certain severely practical limits. To attempt to traverse all the ground which the various relief organisations in fact covered would almost certainly have bogged me down, and just as surely, as were some of the hapless victims whose vicissitudes and triumphs form the contents of succeeding chapters. I have, therefore, confined myself to that part of the great trek over which the Indian tea industry exercised a beneficent and merciful supervision. It is not the whole of the grim odyssey, but a big enough part of it to justify a volume to itself.

* * *

To understand the problem which confronted the authorities in India in the spring of 1942, it is necessary to take the reader

back a bit, and to recapitulate events which now seem remote, but which are really set in the relatively recent past. We may take as our point of departure February 20th, 1942, the date on which the partial evacuation of Rangoon was begun. Events, and the enemy, had moved quickly since the Japanese had invaded the Tenasserim districts of Burma early in December. We know now that, hard pressed as we were on every front of a global war, and with a vast garrison tied up in Malaya, our resources for the defence of Burma were probably inadequate from the beginning of a campaign which, as time went on, necessarily partook of the nature of a defensive and delaying action. At that moment, however, we had some reason to hope, and believe, that if not the whole, at least the northern part of the country, might be held against the enemy. On the other hand, the dislocation by air raids of the life of the capital city, and the rapid advance of the enemy's forces from the south, had created a profound psychological effect, particularly upon the million Indian citizens living mainly in the districts of Central and Lower Burma. Their position, indeed the position of Indians in all parts of Burma, has never been fully appreciated except by those who have had prolonged and intimate contact with the Indian community. Up to the time of the Japanese occupation they constituted an important enclave in the country's economic life, their industry and attention to business constituting a source of wealth out of all proportion to their numbers. The Burmans have always regarded the Indian in their midst with envy, amounting sometimes to resentment; nor in times of political or social tension has the Indian felt himself entirely at home in Burma, even though he and his forefathers may have been resident there for several generations. Minority problems are not entirely confined to Europe, and the presence of a prosperous Indian community has always constituted Burma's minority problem number one. In the circumstances that prevailed in January and February 1942 it was but natural that the first impulse to leave the country, which was by then partially occupied by the enemy, should be felt by the Indian minority. Whilst there was still time many thousands left by sea for Calcutta and Chittagong, but with the progressive deterioration of dock facilities at Rangoon and its subsequent fall, further evacuation by sea became impossible. Thereafter some refugees, mostly Indians, essayed the journey to India by the southern coastal belt, following the line between the mountains and the sea entering India *via* Cox Bazaar and Chittagong, passing over country which was later to become the scene of a good deal of bloody fighting between ourselves and the Japs. These refugees suffered a good

deal of privation, a heavy incidence of disease and consequently a high death rate. This particular exodus forms no part of my story, for such succour as they received was from purely official sources ; but their misfortunes were a precursor of bigger things to come, and one may be permitted to speculate whether the lessons of the occasion were fully assimilated by those in authority in India and Burma who were soon to be faced with the necessity of making plans upon the success of which thousands of lives were to depend. For soon after the sea routes were finally closed, and this one ill-starred land attempt to leave the country had proceeded on its way, there began the great trek northward of an unnumbered multitude. The great majority were Indians seeking escape to their own country, by means of little known land routes into Assam. But not all were so disposed, and a considerable percentage of the vast concourse that made its way northwards were men and women of all communities who anticipated that, at some point or another, the Japanese armies would be contained and that part of Burma would be held and the invasion brought to a standstill. I am not in a position to state whether this expectation was ever seriously encouraged by the civil or military authorities on the spot, but for many it undoubtedly kept alive the flame of hope which was to flicker so tremulously on many occasions before the end of the long, or the last, journey was reached.

* * *

Movement inside Burma itself was conditioned by the fact that the country's main means of communications—road, river and rail—all run from south to north ; and after the limited possibilities of the one exiguous east-west land route *via* the Arakan had been finally exhausted, refugees in their thousands were driven northward in the wake of the swirling tide of battle, the fortunes of which continued to go steadily against the Allied armies. The focal points towards which this great concentration of humanity advanced in a swelling stream were the towns of Mandalay, Kalewa, Bhamo and Myitkyina in Upper Burma, all of which at varying dates in May 1942 fell into enemy hands. By the middle of May 1942 the Japanese were in control of all these jumping off places, and soon every gap in the frontier belt of hills which looked like offering an escape to India became a refugee route, even those in the far north-east which were known to be hazardous in the extreme. But, in order to reach these points of dubious vantage to make the main journey across some hundreds of miles of no man's land into India, considerable trials

had first to be overcome in Burma itself Over this first section of the long pilgrimage the Indian refugees, for the most part poor, ignorant and defenceless, seem to have suffered most. A number of writers, who saw their plight at first hand, have testified to their pitiable condition. Mr. O. D. Gallagher in his highly controversial *Retreat In The East* describes how thousands of people without money or influence trekked the long road north, suffering great hardships—the small wage-earning Indian particularly, for not only was he short of every necessity, but he lived in fear, sometimes rightly, often wrongly, that he would be set upon, by the Burmese All had the same blind hope of reaching their homeland, India. Many got there, despite all.

> "I saw one such caravan numbering about 4,000 men, women and children. They could move only a few miles a day as their pace was regulated by that of the oxen who pulled their cumbersome carts I have seen refugees in Spain, China and France, but none to compare with these people . . . . . They said the Burmese were too cowardly to attack them by day, but sneaked round the edges of the caravan under cover of the night, and silently slew with knives those unlucky enough to be remote from the main body. They then plundered the carts of the slain.
>
> "They searched among their crowded members for someone who could speak English, and produced a man who had been a tailor. Through him they enquired about the best road to take to India. They had about 1,200 miles to walk. . . . . They were so anxious to find someone to take an interest in them and their plight."

In *Red Moon Rising* George Rodger, a first class cameraman, journeying from north to south says:

> "As we went further south, the bands of refugees became thicker on the road until we found them struggling northwards in a continual stream . . . . . Dock labourers, coolies and bearers plodded side by side with clerks and government servants, their womenfolk and children trailing beside them. In endless streams they came—women tired out and hobbling along by the aid of sticks; men carrying babies in panniers from their shoulders, others carrying small children on their backs. Some of the women carried dry wood on their heads for, with such a large party, it was not easy to find fuel for their fires wherever they stopped for the night, and it was not safe to forage in the jungle where Burmans might be lurking. . . . . Most of them were already lame. The older people were obviously exhausted. Some of the men pulled heavy carts in which their women and children perched on top of their household goods, but the majority had been unable to bring more than a small bundle of personal things with them. I was struck by the incongruity of the articles that some of them had chosen to salvage from their homes, when nothing but the most indispensable things could be carried. One man had a cross-cut saw over his shoulder, another lugged along a large tom-tom, several had umbrellas, and one carried a bicycle with the back wheel missing . . . . . "

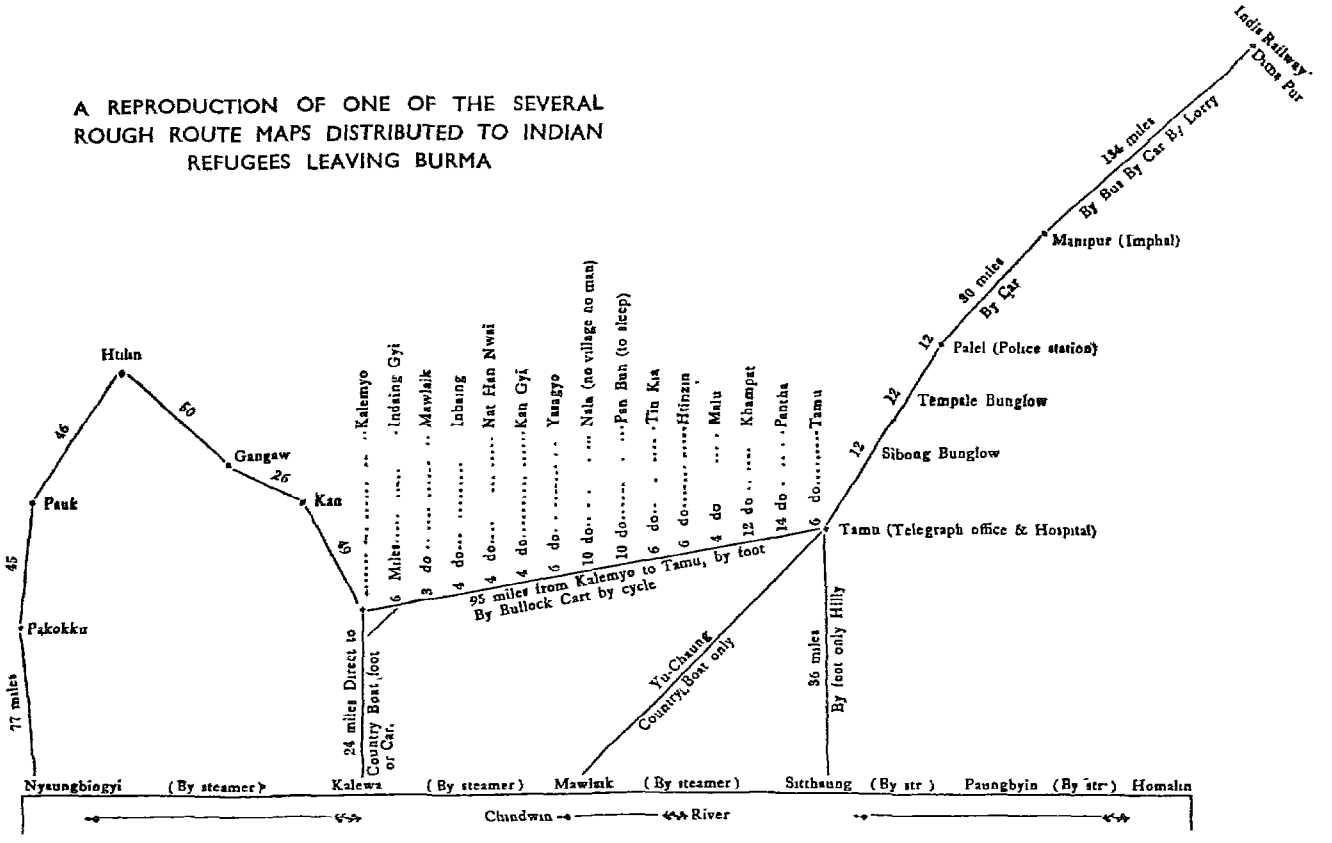
So much for the general conditions in which the Indian refugees travelled to the outposts from which the supreme bid

for safety was to be made. By the time the last stage of the journey began many were already very near to mental and physical exhaustion. But they were not all. I asked an Indian Army officer, who served in a forward relief camp organised by the Indian Tea Association from May to July, and to whom I am indebted for much background information, for an analysis of the national and social groups of refugees who passed through his hands. The tragic and motley crowd consisted of British and Indian subjects, comprising Britons, Gurkhas, mixed Indian stragglers from the Army in Burma, South-Indians, Ooriyas, Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmans as well as some Italians, Poles, Germans, Swedes, Jamaicans, West Indian negroes, Chinese troops and even one Red Indian. These latter categories were not numerically important, but they serve to illustrate the truly catholic nature of the mission in which the Indian tea industry ultimately found itself engaged.

* * * * *

All the authorities on the subject, as well as participants in the relief operations on the Indian side of the frontier, are agreed that one of the continuing handicaps in the situation was the absence of reliable information from Burma as to the scope and extent of the refugee problem. The lack of even the most approximate statistics imposed a very serious limitation on all kinds of forward planning. I shall have occasion to refer to this matter again. I mention it at this early stage in the narrative because, even now, estimates vary very considerably as to the precise state of affairs in Upper Burma by the time the exodus northward had come to a halt, and the refugees began to turn west to India. I have briefly tried to show how the bulk of the lower class Indian refugees fared in the first lap of the journey inside Burma itself. In order, however, to get the picture into proper focus it is necessary to go back on our tracks a little, in order to see how and in what circumstances Indians of other classes, and the great mixed population referred to above, essayed a journey which was to prove a most exacting test of the physical and moral qualities of those who undertook it. By the beginning of May 1942 everyone who intended to leave Burma had already gone, or had headed north for Mandalay and Myitkyina. Those who failed to get away in the early stages of the exodus had followed, from south to north, the two chief congested lines of communication whose principal road, rail and river routes ran roughly along the lines of the Irrawaddy and Sittang valleys. Mandalay had fallen to Japanese forces on May 1st. Up to this date the

A REPRODUCTION OF ONE OF THE SEVERAL ROUGH ROUTE MAPS DISTRIBUTED TO INDIAN REFUGEES LEAVING BURMA



Chindwin Valley had been the main route to Manipur and safety, and the small town of Kalewa on that river had been the collecting centre of refugees hoping to use the Tamu route into Imphal. On May 12th Kalewa was abandoned, and soon afterwards Bhamo and Myitkyina fell to the enemy. But for those in the extreme north it was hoped to arrange a mass air evacuation to India before the monsoon rains finally broke, and in this expectation thousands of refugees concentrated on Myitkyina As to a large part, they consisted of men and women who had stayed at subordinate posts in the civil and administrative life of Burma to the last possible moment. Many of them, in fact, represented the backbone of such resistance as the civil government of the country had been able to offer against the advancing enemy. The resources of the small town of Myitkyina itself were quite inadequate to the tremendous influx of refugees of all communities from Lower Burma. Every available nook and corner was occupied by waiting men, women and children, and those who were unable to find shelter of the ordinary kind were put into camps or housed in schools and other public buildings, whilst other groups lived in the jungles on the outskirts of the town. For many it was a grim curtain raiser to greater hardships to come, as they waited anxiously for a plane to take them on to what they hoped would be the last lap of their journey. The devil was indeed hard on the tails of the hindmost ; and it is one of the ironies of the Burma campaign of 1942 that those who stayed to the last at their posts, in support of the civil and military authorities, stood the poorest chance of getting away to India and, if they were successful in so doing, only reached safety by battling their way through conditons such as the earlier refugees never experienced. As long as the Douglas transports were able to run to and from India they crammed as many as 75 into each machine, but even at this dangerous rate of transportation the situation in Myitkyina could not be appreciably relieved, unless many more aircraft were made available and the proposition tackled in a big way. I have been told that a mass air evacuation of Myitkyina was planned for May 15th, but there is no record in support of this. Myitkyina aerodrome was bombed twice on May 6th and put out of action, and on May 7th it was evacuated. Just as the first party was ready to leave on that date Myitkyina was again bombed. On this occasion the town, as well as the aerodrome, was the target and vicious fires swept the place. The Japs entered on May 8th. A further decisive calamity was the breaking of the monsoon several days before due date. From that moment evacuation by air was severely curtailed, and finally petered out. Facing up to the new and

almost desperate situation, the authorities were obliged to tell the hapless congregation that their only hope lay in making their way to India on foot. The effect of this last injunction can be better imagined than described. Virtually the end of any organised government in Burma, it was a shattering blow to thousands of already sorely tried children of the Raj, many of whom, be it said, who had spurned earlier chances to get away as long as there was a job of work to be done in defence of the country.

Looking back objectively on those last fateful days in Upper Burma, it is a reasonable assumption that the vast majority of the refugees, who were to pass through the Indian Tea Association's relief organisation in the next few months, had already been subjected to a profound physical and psychological strain before they began the last, and more arduous, stage of the journey to India The trek to Upper Burma in the van of a hostile army, sporadic enemy bombing, the frequent difficulty of finding food and shelter and the climatic conditions of the fag end of the hot weather combined to create conditions that were a challenge to the stoutest heart and a tax on the strongest physique. It was at the end of such an experience that they had to bring themselves to face the sternest test of all. Reading the diaries, letters and other personal documents that have been placed at my disposal for the purposes of writing this book, I have sometimes wondered whether, having regard to the purely humanitarian aspect of the matter, such an evacuation as was to ensue presents many advantages over 'staying put', even in the presence of such an unpredictable and barbarous foe as the Jap. And yet, on second thoughts, I realise that had I been in the same predicament and faced with the same choice, I would have made the same decision as did these leaderless, and almost lost, thousands. The practically universal ignorance of the distance and the rigours of the journey to India was, in a sense, a blessing in disguise; for it served to provide the kind of hopefulness that is an asset at the beginning of a hazardous journey. But there is no doubt that both in mind and in body many of them were ill-prepared for what was to come. To take only one simple example, of what I mean: many of the refugees who reached Upper Burma were really only prepared to be flown out of the country. Before reaching a place like Myitkyina, from where they had expected evacuation by air, they had already discarded most of their useful clothing, retaining their most expensive kit on their backs and such things as papers, jewelry and money which could be conveniently taken by plane. By the time they found that evacuation by air was impossible there was nothing in the shape of blankets, boots or other necessary articles to be bought in the bazaars of Upper

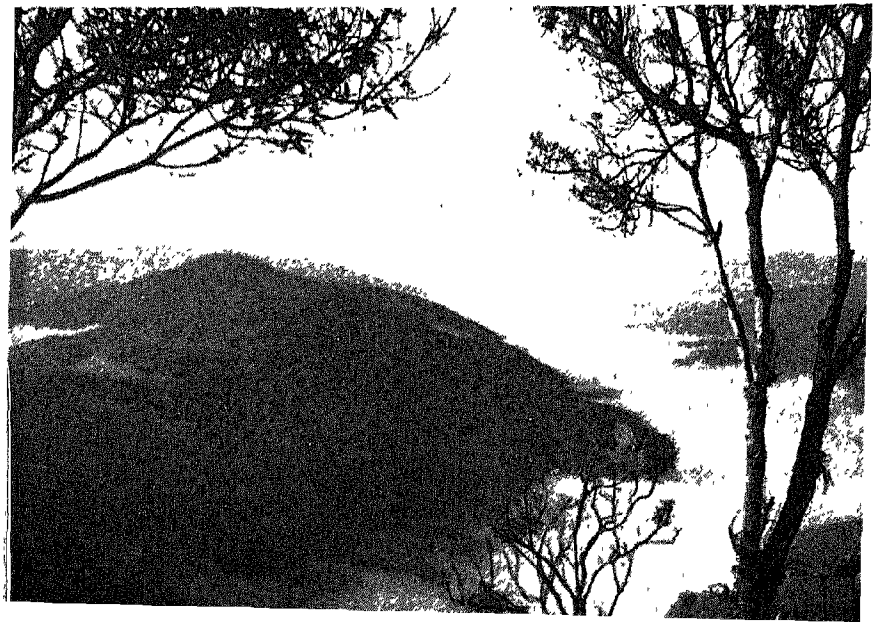
Burma, and they started to foot it to India in the expensive, but not necessarily utilitarian, clothing they had chosen for the promised air trip. That is the reason why many women ultimately arrived in such flimsy garments, and not a few were found dead at lonely spots in the Naga country, clad in the fine evening gowns which in happier times they had purchased in London, Calcutta or Rangoon. In the proper sense of the words, it was quite impossible to integrate and *organise* the great bulk of the refugees who came over the northern land routes. Even if there had been time, it is doubtful if stores and equipment in the necessary quantities were available for the purpose in Upper Burma, and as I have said before, in the mass, the refugees were leaderless and largely without guidance, at least until they reached the outposts of the Indian relief organisation which had been thrown as far as possible across the no-man's land of the Indo-Burma border of that time. The big concentration of refugees at Myitkyina, and other places, broke up into small parties for the journey, and human nature being what it is these parties automatically threw up their own leader or leaders ; though it is doubtful if the latter were as important to the success of the enterprise as the odd member of a party who could cook decently. Those parties which included a man or a woman whose cooking, however primitive, was also wholesome and clean came through best and with least demoralisation. For, as we shall see, mal-nutrition was the basis of almost all the illness which was to take such a heavy toll in death and suffering of those who had now turned their faces to the Indian horizon.

CHAPTER II.

ENTER THE PLANTER.

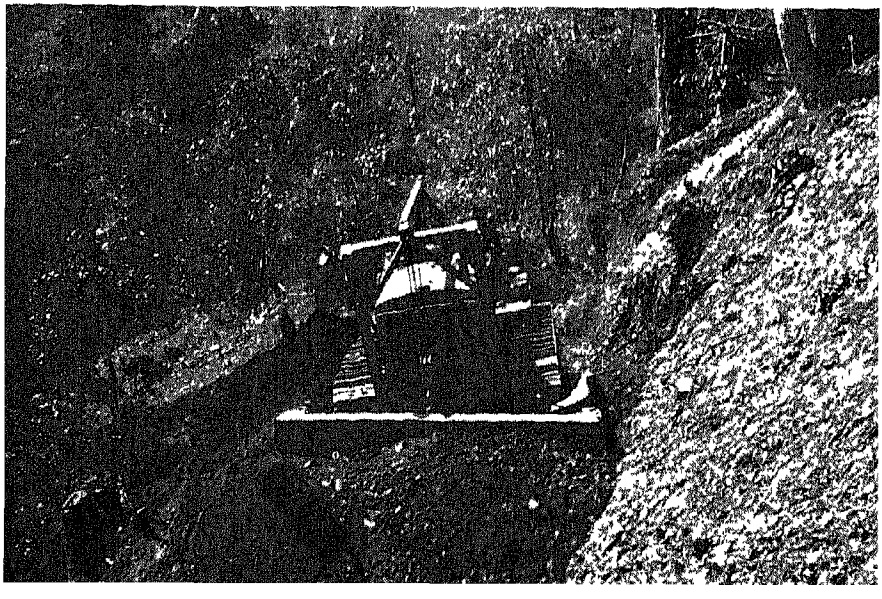
IT is now necessary to say something of the precise point at which the Indian Tea Association comes into the sombre picture, which the retreat from Burma constituted. Later on I shall return to the main thread of the story, which is chiefly concerned with the civilian evacuation. But sometime before the latter had started in full spate, it was clear to those in authority that the military situation in Burma had become extremely serious. By March 1942 the Burma Road to Kunming in China was effectively closed, and it seemed that the best—a doubtful best—which the British forces could hope for was the retention of a foothold south of the Assam-Burma hills. Its geographical position at once made the province of Assam of supreme military importance, both as a possible means of maintaining contact with China by land routes and as a military supply base for the defence of India, no less than for counter attack into Burma. Subsequent events have made the world fully familiar with the strategic significance of Assam, which as recently as three years ago was but poorly equipped in communications and other facilities for the role it has since been called upon to play. Early in March 1942, therefore, the India Command and the Government of India, decided upon an urgent road building programme designed to connect Assam with Burma and China. It was realised that the only organised body, able to get to work on such a project without delay was the Indian tea industry, with its intimate knowledge of the eastern frontier as a whole and the province of Assam in particular, backed up by practical resources that included several hundred experienced European planters and nearly six hundred thousand tea garden labourers, either on the spot or in districts contiguous to the proposed scene of operations. From the time that decision was made until the present moment, the tea industry through the agency of the Indian Tea Association, has been a wholehearted an indispensable collaborator in military engineering projects of the highest possible value to the war in the East. By the middle of the month, the Indian Tea Association had begun operations on road making projects, based on the Indo-Burma border, of the highest political and strategic importance. For obvious reasons, I cannot at this stage enter into too much detail, but it can be recorded that at the time the plans

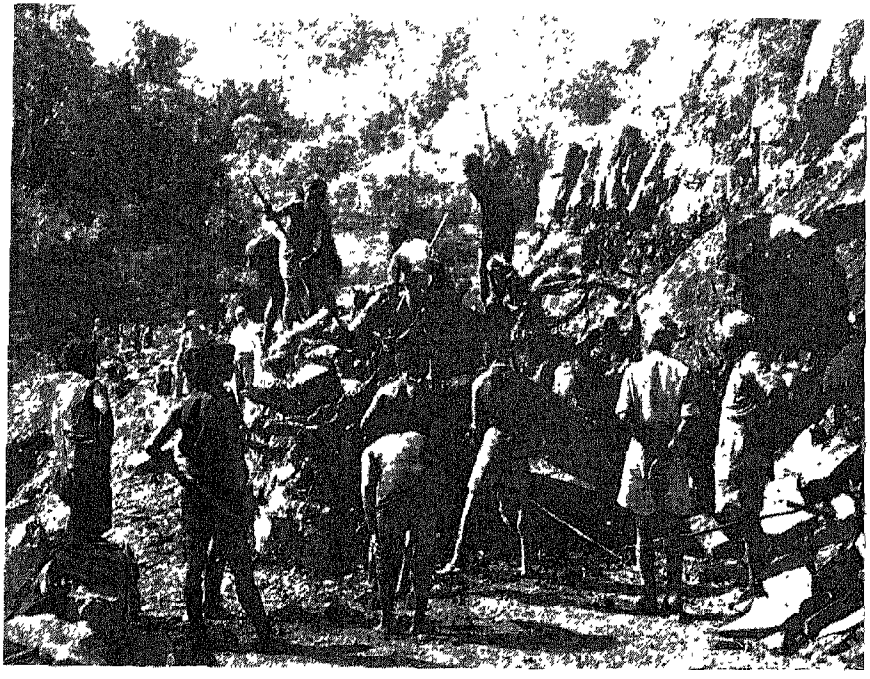
Two typical views of the border country between Burma and Assam over which the refugees by the Manipur route had to make their way. Steep mountain ranges and mists in the valleys were characteristic of the country.



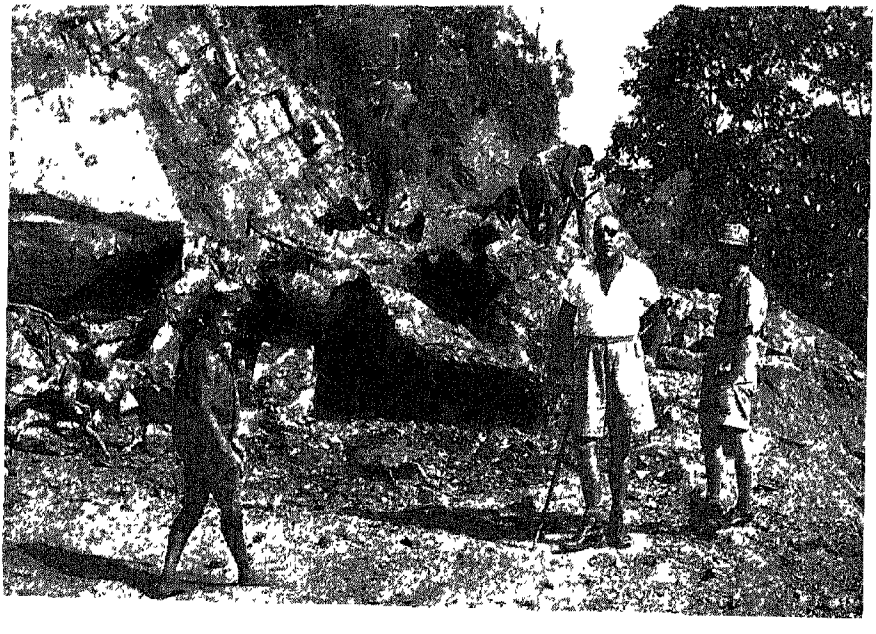
The birth of a new road into Burma.

BELOW: *Loading a truck with red earth for work on a ship.*





Apart from succouring refugees, the Indian tea industry has assisted the military authorities in a vast road making programme which has created new highways over the mountain passes into Burma.



Abors played an important part as guides and porters on various evacuation routes. Here are four typical Abors

Three typical members of the Mishmi tribe

were prepared and approved the work was designated as of first priority in all India. Operations began at a moment when not merely every day, but every hour counted, and both planning and work on the ground had to be carried out in a constant and never ending struggle against time. But the point that I want to make now is that by May 1942, when the civilian evacuation really got under way, the Indian Tea Association was already to a large extent mobilised to help the authorities in whatever emergency might arise. Seasoned planters and their labour had already left work on the gardens for the roads, and had begun to get the feel of the terrain in which their energies were soon to be diverted to relief and rescue operations on a scale that has probably never been attempted before. At the same time the pivotal and driving force of the tea industry, the executive committee of the Indian Tea Association, was daily acquiring experience of the staff work necessary for the maintenance in the field of what was virtually a new kind of expeditionary force. For this was what such an army of thousands of tea garden coolies, officered by their planter superiors, amounted to. And it so happened that when the call for succour came from across the Burma border, the Indian Tea Association's forces in the field were already disposed in the direction of those very gaps in the mountains through which distressed humanity was to pour in its thousands in the next few months. It was not an easy matter to reorientate and enlarge a road making project into a rescue and relief organisation, but when the grim necessity arose it was infinitely better than starting *ab initio*.

It should be said that the mass evacuee movement towards India by the Assam land routes began to develop some weeks before the events of May, described in the last chapter. It will perhaps help the reader to a clear understanding of the situation if I here list the three main routes upon which the Indian Tea Association relief organisation operated. They were :—

1. Tamu-Imphal-Dimapur and the Brahmaputra Valley.
2. Imphal-Bishenpur-Silchar and the Burma Valley.
3. The routes in the extreme north-east, *via* the Hukawng Valley and the Patkoi Mountains to Ledo, thence by train or steamer down the Brahmaputra Valley.

By February 25th the Government of Assam were notified by the Government of India that a mass movement of Indian refugees towards the Assam border had begun, and that the main surge would be towards Tamu just inside the Burma border. It was an accurate forecast, for ultimately there passed through the Dimapur camp about 150,000 refugees against an estimated

37,500 through Silchar Camp and 22,000 through the Ledo Camp. But even at this early stage, when organised evacuation was still possible from the Burma end, there was no reliable estimate of numbers which were reported to range between the generous limits of 70,000 and 250,000. The place names of the first two of the above mentioned routes have now been made familiar to a wide public in Britain, India and the United States of America by the reason of the recent heavy fighting which has taken place in the locality. But at the time of which I write they were little known except to a very few whose business or administrative activities brought them in touch with this obscure corner of the world. The chief features of the north-eastern Hukawng Valley routes to Ledo are described on a later page, as is the forbidding country which the Chaukan Pass expedition traversed. But all the mountain tracks from Burma into Assam, and particularly those which descend upon the Manipur plain are dominated by certain geographical conditions which are common throughout the 400 miles of the Assam-Burma frontier. The frontier runs from north-east to south-west through a series of parallel jungle hill tracts with heights occasionally running up to 12,000 feet above sea level, but more often ranging from 5,000 to 8,000 feet and diminishing in height to the south-west. This frontier belt of hills and jungle varies from 100 to 200 miles in width, and is inhabited mainly by Naga and Kuki tribes speaking a language which has nothing in common with any of the many languages spoken by the refugees who came over these hills. Incidentally, the country for hundreds of miles hereabouts is an anthropologist's paradise, particularly in its northern and north-eastern aspects. Head hunting is by no means extinct. Towards the Burma frontier, and with only two lines of hills intervening, is the State of Manipur, a fertile plateau about 2,000 feet high. From the encircling hills to the east and south run tracks, which in their later stages become roads, converging on Imphal, the capital and the only town in the State. At the time of which I am writing, there ran northwards from Imphal the only exit road to rail head at Dimapur, 134 miles away. This road which winds its tortuous way over hills and saddles carried only single way traffic with a crossing station at Mao about half way to Dimapur. It was to dominate all the problems of the refugees as well as the then military situation on the North-East Frontier. On the Burma side of the frontier runs the river Chindwin, flowing from north to south through a malaria infested plain liable to heavy flooding, almost roadless and thinly populated. The physical features, therefore, contribute to making the frontier belt a wilderness. It is a wildnerness with no through transverse

communication and apart from the Imphal-Dimapur road, communication has always been mainly by bridle paths aligned for sturdy Nagas rather than enfeebled refugees from the plains of Burma. In parts pack ponies are used for transport, but more frequently all the inhabitants down to small children are accustomed to carrying heavy loads from local village markets to their hillside homes. For the scanty population sufficient food supplies, except such articles as salt, are produced locally but there are no reserves for any newcomers, even if such newcomers could stomach the spartan diet of the hill tribes. Geography alone therefore made any trans-frontier movement difficult, but as both the Governments of India and Burma had actively discouraged such traffic, the result was that few people knew what was involved in a cross country journey from say Mandalay to Dimapur or even Kalewa to Imphal. Lying roughly to the north and south of the mountain barrier that constitutes the Indo-Burma border are the two great valleys which are the chief geographical features of the little known Indian Province of Assam. The Brahmaputra Valley is a region comparatively well served by communications, for in addition to the navigable river from which it derives its name a single track metre guage railway, and a gravelled road running roughly parallel to the river, provided easy communication, even in the far away days of peace. To the south of this hill barrier is another plain known as the Surma Valley. In these two valleys live more than three quarters of the population of Assam, of whom more than one million are dependent for their livelihood upon the tea industry.

* * * *

On such a province the impact of war was bound to be overwhelming. Even in the second quarter of the twentieth century, Assam's resources are still susceptible of development. At the beginning of the war its communications were exclusively those of a rural economy, not yet convinced of the need for extensive links with the outside world. Its largest industry was the agricultural pursuit of growing tea. Its people had neither martial traditions nor industrial opportunity. The provincial government possessed neither the finance nor the personnel to cope with an emergency which, in any case, was clearly a national responsibility. Administration was spread thin over vast distances, executive officers had charge of districts for the most part exceedingly unwieldy, and Government had little or no reserves of man power on which to draw in times of crisis. In the past, however, emergencies had been so rare that both the people and

the Government of the Province had acquired a serenity of outlook which could not quickly be brought to a realisation of the enormous effort required to cope with the grave situation now developing beyond the Assam-Burma border. Whilst it was becoming obvious that the crisis would ultimately tax the maximum resources of the Central Government, Delhi was proverbially and literally a long way off, and upon the Provincial Government fell the task of mobilising quickly whatever assistance it could improvise locally. An early call was made on the tea industry through the two branches of the Indian Tea Association in the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys.

Here it is desirable to say a word in explanation of how such a call, which turned out to be but the first of a series of distress signals, could be answered by a whole industry. The Indian Tea Association is an old established association of producers familiarly, and in many quarters in Assam affectionately, known as the "I.T.A." The tea garden members of this Association produce 90 per cent. of Assam's tea, which is equivalent to nearly 60 per cent. of India's total crop. On these tea estates more than 600 square miles are under tea, yielding an average annual crop of more than 280 million lbs. An industry of this size which provided a livelihood for over one million people had need in peace time, and had in fact developed, a strong and alert association to deal, amongst other things, with the allied problems of recruiting a diversified labour force and promoting its health and contentment. Circle committees, organised on a district basis, gave the branches prompt and accurate information on the availability of men and materials in their own area. The latter were thus able to make an assessment periodically for the Indian Tea Association Calcutta, which draws its members from the large agency houses who are empowered to act for the majority of rupee and sterling companies and proprietors, not only in Assam but also in the neighbouring Province of Bengal. The Calcutta Committee in its turn provides a link with the Indian Tea Association London, on which body are represented the large sterling tea companies. Difficult wartime communications between Calcutta and London have sometimes made the link a little tenuous, but this affected neither the willingness nor the capacity of the industry to take on new tasks.

The first requests for assistance in refugees work from the civil authorities were followed, almost within a few hours, by large demands from the military authorities for volunteer labour from the tea industry. The structure of the I.T.A. was readily adapted to wartime emergencies, for the Calcutta Committee produced from its own ranks a small planning staff, prosaically

called the Projects Sub-Committee. This supreme general staff received such loyal and continuous co-operation from proprietary interests of all kinds, that it was able from the beginning to issue directives to the Circle organisations to supply quotas of managers, labour, tools, transport, doctors, medical supplies and stores of all kinds at the right place and, in spite of all the hazards of transportation in Assam, at the right time. The maintenance of this labour, equivalent in numbers at its later strength to many military divisions, called for a supply organisation which could not only procure foodstuffs and equipment quickly, but also ensure their transportation over the badly congested lines of communication leading into Assam.

Four aspects of the general problem of using the tea industry's resources to the full, called for unremitting attention from Calcutta and from the districts. In the first place it was highly important to maintain the familiar British supervision to which the labour had been long accustomed. Secondly each labour force had to be self-contained and supporting, bringing from its gardens medical units, camp builders, pay clerks, etc. Thirdly, the principle that service on Projects, however dangerous or arduous, was always voluntary, had to be rigidly observed. And finally, recruitment for the industry, from the Provinces beyond Assam, had to be stepped up to a higher level than in peace time.

Success over this wide field of operations can be attributed to the ready acceptance of new and onerous burdens by companies, many of whom had their headquarters in England, and whose proprietors for reasons of security, could not even be told the nature of the projects for which their assistance was being invoked. Equally important was the acceptance by Indian labour of an obligation to help the victims of Japanese aggression and to assist in other ways in throwing back the invader.

* * * *

It will be convenient if we take the end of February as the point at which to begin the narrative of relief operations proper. We have already seen that by that date the authorities in India were aware that the refugee problem was taking certain definite shape, and that if a tragedy of unprecedented magnitude was to be averted the civilian exodus from Burma could not be left to spill over into India merely as a confused, disorganised and debilitated mass of humanity. As a beginning, the Government of Assam asked the Indian Tea Association's chief representative at its headquarters in Shillong whether the European community

could assit in finding men who could deal with crowds, and organise camps in difficult conditions, where outbreaks of disease were regarded as imminent. After quick consultations with Calcutta and Jorhat, an answer was forthcoming which left Government in no doubt that an industry, which had already released half its men for military service, was ready to make any further sacrifices necessitated by the darkening situation on the border. Both rupee and sterling tea companies indicated their willingness to provide volunteers up to the limit of their capacity for the relief work, the full extent of which could only yet be very roughly estimated. On February 27th the Political Agent, Manipur, wired that he required a dozen camp officers immediately. These were selected from the many offers that had already been received, and by March 3rd twelve good men and true (and one wife) assembled at Dimapur, together with some stores, transport and equipment, to be joined almost immediately afterwards by a medical unit from the Assam Oil Company at Digboi, which had worked all through the previous night to load its gear and make the 250 mile journey to Dimapur. This latter has been described to me as a beautiful piece of organisation which exceeded the highest expectations. Thus on March 3rd the first relief expedition took practical shape. The date is historic.

The experience acquired by this little band of pioneers, who commenced operations on the Tamu-Imphal-Dimapur refugee route, was to provide guidance in the formation of the many relief parties that were brought into being in the weeks and months that lay immediately ahead. The Indian Tea Association was already at work building, strengthening and repairing the Manipur Road, which between Dimapur and Imphal, was a single track of 134 miles. At the time of which I write Army personnel on the spot consisted of little more than a token force, working out the necessary plans to transform the then insignificant little track into a major supply route into Burma. In relief operations of the kind which confronted the authorities at that moment, the prime objective was obviously to throw the life-lines as far forward as they could —to make food, shelter, medical assistance and transportation available to the oncoming refugees at as early a point on their journey as possible. By the time this first party of planter workers had reached Imphal on the evening of March 4th they had run straight into the problem of transport—a problem which on this road was to prove a nightmare for Army chiefs, the Refugee Organisation and the planters in charge of large contingents of labour yet to come. Some of them had cars, but as they all carried camp kit and stores, ready to do anything and go anywhere for a long period,

they needed lorries. So apparently did the Army personnel, the P.W.D. and the Political Agent, Manipur. As the first night wore on, hard beds and hard rations brought them into the open before dawn and before other competitors for lorries, but not before the Digboi contingent, so that their lorries and cars made an early start. At the control station half way to Imphal they passed a few trucks bringing in refugees, who were in good physical shape and obviously fairly well to do. Some of them were carrying absurdly large amounts of luggage, including sewing machines and ornate wireless sets.

At this point it is perhaps worth while stating an important general consideration which governs a job of this kind. Whatever the transport employed it has to sustain itself, as to food or fuel, whilst on the road For example a lorry or a car must carry its own petrol, whilst a porter carrying a 50 lb. load probably consumes 2 lbs. a day of that load as food, and if his journey is of any distance consumption at this rate rapidly reduces the amount of real relief he can transport from one point to another. This was particularly the case in a country in which only very slender local resources existed to eke out the rations that were carried. Another circumstance which has a direct bearing on this important incremental factor is speed. For instance, in the closing stage of the evacuation by the northern route, over the Pangsau Pass, the difficulties with mud were so great as to limit the daily journey of a porter to three miles, which required between ten and twelve hours to accomplish.

The problem of the Political Agent expressed itself in three major anxieties. He had to get refugees out of Burma and down to the rail head: he had to maintain civilian labour on a new military road which was being pushed forward from the Palel terminus, and whose alignment crossed in places the bridle path on which the main stream of refugees was moving: and thirdly, supplies for the endangered Army in Burma had to be pushed through at all costs, using whatever porterage was available, until the road could carry transport. At that time the number of refugees coming into Imphal from several directions, mainly from Palel, was rising and had reached about 600 per day. There was a control station at Tamu just inside the Burma border, staffed by the Burma Government. The shortest track from Tamu to Palel was *via* Lokchao and Tengnoupal. This was already befouled by refugees, and cholera had broken out amongst the local population working on the road. The stories told by refuges, together with the fear of cholera, had their effect on the road labour, which was rapidly thinning out. The fact that the earlier, and comparatively well to do, refugees had been allowed to bring

out of Burma a large amount of luggage, for whose porterage they were prepared to offer large sums, had made road work less attractive. Rumour and cupidity were rapidly bringing work to a standstill. Thus there was the possibility of a serious clash of interests between the military authorities, urgently requiring a road to carry supplies through to the Army, and the civil administration, responsible for getting as many refugees as possible in to safety. Already camps were being built on another track to the north of the supply route, so that labour would be spared these damaging contacts with refugees. The two routes and the camps which were the concern of the planting team were :

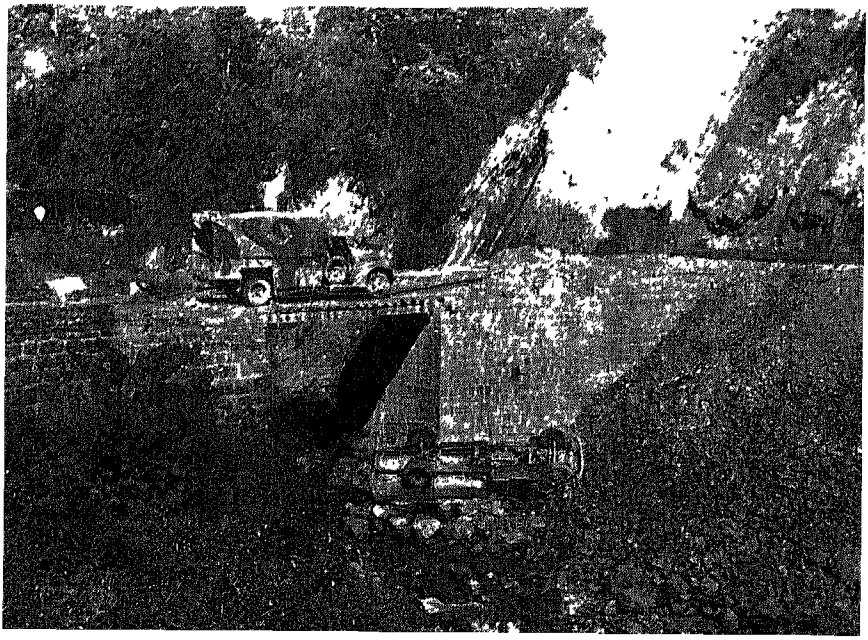
(1) (*a*) Tamu—mile 57 : a distance of 5 miles
(*b*) Mile 57 to the Lokchao river : 7 miles
(*c*) Lokchao river—Khongkong : 6 miles
(*d*) Khongkong to Tengnoupal : 5 miles
(*e*) Tengnoupal—Palel : 7 miles
Palel to Imphaul and Korengei camps by lorry.

(2) (*a*) Tamu—Woksu
(*b*) Woksu—Lamlong
(*c*) Lamlong—Sita
(*d*) Sita—Nangtok
(*e*) Nangtok—Heirok/Wangjing
Heirok/Wangjing to Imphal and Korengei camps was done by lorry.

Korengei was the large dispersal camp, from which refugees were sent by lorry direct to Dimapur.

Nor were the planters' special gifts without their usefulness in a labour situation that was largely compounded of psychological factors. We have already glimpsed some of the reasons why labour was abondoning road construction. Two days after arrival on the Tamu route, three members of the planters team went out to survey the new road trace north of the main supply route and to report on the ability of tea garden labourers to live in such conditions, work with road making machines and the Army Pioneer units. Their report was encouraging. The survey party returned convinced that tea garden labour units, provided they had their own managers with them, medical stores and medical staff, food supplies and their own foremen, could do this road work, and if their contact with fleeing refugees was not frequent they might be relied upon to stay on the job and help to see the military road through to Tamu. Quite apart from porterage for the rescue and relief operations, some 45,000 labourers had to be recruited, transported, accommodated, fed and directed for the southern road effort and 30,000 for work on the northern roads. On the 5th and 6th March the planting team moved out to their allotted stations. They had appointed their own quartermaster, to remain in Imphal to send out stores and

The almost finished product ABOVE *A frontier road, which tea planters and labourers had made, nearing completion, and* BELOW. *A casualty in the ravine below the bridge.*



Rangpang Nagas at Nambong.

Chang Naga Scouts.

Chang Nagas in full ceremonials. Chang Nagas live on the Burma side of the Frontier.

to procure and direct transport. Each man in the party was pabest pointed a Camp Commandant and instructed to organise as he could the Porter Corps which was being mobilised to carry the luggage of refugees; to pay these porters and to keep them on the job; to see that reserves of rations for refugees were built up, and were fairly distributed each day; to see that the camps were cleared every 24 hours and to carry out as many sanitary precautions as were possible in exceedingly primitive conditions. General instructions of this kind were all that were possible in the circumstances, or that were asked for by the men themselves. If the camps were not built, the planters would help in constructing them; if they were not large enough, they would extend them; if they were built they would run them Such was the prescription to which relief work was begun.

Before proceeding to give a more detailed account of daily life and work on the Tamu-Imphal-Dimapur route, we should also note the organisation of an overflow refugee route from Bishenpur to the river crossing at Jhirighat, and thence to Silchar, the terminus of the Assam-Bengal Railway. This Bishenpur-Silcher route was important, because from Imphal southwestwards there is a motor road to Bishenpur 14 miles away. From Bishenpur over a series of mountain ranges running north to south, there is a bridle path to Jhirighat running roughly due west, a distance of 86 miles. The track lay over difficult country where no wheeled assistance was possible before Jhirighat.

The stages on the route were :—

(*a*) Bishenpur—Lamatok : 12 miles
(*b*) Lamatok—Kopum : 13 miles
(*c*) Kopum—Lenvolok : 12 miles
(*d*) Lenvolok—Barak : 15 miles
(*e*) Barak—Makru : 13 miles
(*f*) Makru—Jhirighat : 14 miles
(*g*) Jhirighat—Fullertol : 11 miles
and thence by steamer or by bus to Silchar.

Early in March, the Government of Assam asked the Surma Valley branch of the Indian Tea Association to organise this overflow route. Though I have occasion to refer to it again, I deal with its genesis now, because it was the special responsibility of the industry for the whole of its existence, and also because it constituted a most valuable adjunct to what we may call the main lines of relief. It did not, however, come into operation for some little time.

At the end of February the Political Agent, Manipur, anticipating the danger of transport services to Dimapur breaking down, and taking a serious view of the growth of refugee traffic,

had pressed for this overflow route to be got ready. In the opinion of many this insistence on preparation for the worst on this route, went far to redeem the sorry story of improvisation, delay and mishaps elsewhere. As a result of this foresight the Indian Tea Association were enabled to put large numbers of labourers, elephants, ponies and bullocks on this bridle path and to stock each camp with food amounting to 25,000 porter loads. The camps were built by tea garden labourers under the supervision of European planters, each camp capable of dealing with 3,000 refugees daily and stocked with food sufficient for a total of 100,000 refugees. By April 19th there had been laid down at each camp 2,000 maunds (70 tons) of foodstuffs comprising rice, dhal, salt, masala and tea, arranged in quality and quantity which was never reached in any of the camps on the Tamu-Imphal-Dimapur route. This route was not opened for refugee traffic until April 28th, but when it was opened, the arrangements made by Camp Commandants, who had been waiting impatiently in their isolated camps for six weeks, were a model of efficiency and expedition. We shall have occasion to look once more at the work on this route as the exodus *via* Manipur and the Chindwin Valley rises to its peak point. But for the sake of chronological accuracy it should be recorded that work on that route commenced on March 6th, 250 tea garden hands under the direction of six planters, complete with medical units and clerical staff undertaking the construction of refugee camps at Jiribam, near Jhirighat, the Makru river crossing and the Barak river crossing.

CHAPTER III.

MUD AND MIRACLES AT DIMAPUR

DURING February it is estimated that about 6,400 refugees passed through Dimapur, and by the middle of March another 9,000 had come and gone. Up to then, and for a good long time afterwards, Dimapur and Imphal were the two great junctions on which there converged separate, and not infrequently competing, streams of traffic. Against the swelling tide of regufees making for the Indian border, and the Army fighting a gallant but frankly defensive action out of Burma, which could not be indefinitely prolonged, there had to be deployed an ever enlarging supply of labour, stores, machinery, personnel and materials of all kinds—all of which had its special role in the situation that was now developing on the eastern frontier. On top of this mosaic of military, administrative and relief activities, there were super-imposed road making operations on a scale never before known in this country. The epicentre of this violent upheaval of human endeavour was the small township of Dimapur, hitherto little more than a name on the map, whose existing resources were quite inadequate to the ebb and flow of men and things on the scale that developed in the spring of 1942. The little five-roomed *dak** bungalow was the scene of many comings and goings, for it had become the nerve centre of all kinds of projects. In the outer left-hand bedroom the Administrator-General Eastern Frontier Projects,† who had been appointed on behalf of the Government of India to exercise a supervisory and co-ordinating interest in all operations on the frontier, had his headquarters. The India Tea Association were allotted the inner right-hand bedroom, which served as office by day and as sleeping quarters for two, and often three, of its officers at night. The dining-room was a mess and conference room, where far-reaching decisions were taken at all hours of the twenty-four. Labour for porterage and road construction began to arrive at the rate of 600 a day, but rose quickly to 1,000, and with increasing congestion on the railway there were delays which resulted in as many as 2,500 arriving on some days. To the British or American reader this probably sounds no very great undertaking; but it has to be remembered that these numbers were

* Dak bangalow=mail runners or posting bungalow.
† Major-General A. E. Wood, C. I. E., M. C.

being tansported over a narrow-gauge, single track railway, the capacity of which was limited to twelve trains per day for all purposes Almost always they ran late, and with maddening frequency would arrive after midnight at a station where the sole illumination consisted of two oil lamps. Spring rain brought out the Dimapur brand of mosquito, which has given this district the highest malaria incidence in Assam. Incidentally, it was quite a time before the railway and postal personnel were strengthened for the greatly enhanced duties which these two services were now called upon to perform. Formalities had largely to go by the board, and the mounting traffic on the railway—stores, lorries, machines, human beings—discharged itself at Dimapur in spite of the regulations. The station-master, an amiable subordinate, was powerless to control this tremendous upsurge of traffic, even if he had wished to do so. With true Oriental courtesy and resignation, he accepted what was inexplicable but apparently inevitable At the post office things were a little different, for the postmaster was not prepared to abdicate so completely to all the fussation going on around him. Letters and telegrams were pouring in by the hundred, and the postmaster single-handed had to operate the telegraph, sort letters, date-stamp them and finally deliver them. The result was a steadily growing time lag in communications, at a moment when quick replies were wanted in answer to urgent enquiries, and this time lag was not reduced by the commendable stoicism with which the Dimapur postmaster contemplated the growing arrears of his work. As for the refugees, a planter on the spot at the time, composed some lines from which the following is taken :

" They were coming in their thousands, they were streaming through Tamu,
The young and old, infirm and fit, determined to get through ;
'Twas survival for the fittest, and downfall for the weak,
As the countless hordes pushed onward, security to seek.
From the shore of Irrawaddy, from bazaars of Mandalay,
They had clutched their goods and chattles ere they started on their way ;
And along the Chindwin Valley, in Rangoon and far Moulmein,
They had seen their houses burning, they had left their kindred slain.
And many were the aged who faltered on the way,
Whose heart and nerve and sinew had known a better day ;

Grim death soon claimed his victims, dread dysentery was rife,
As the multitude pressed forward, goaded on by love of life.
And many were the stragglers, who e'en with succour nigh,
Just fell out by the roadside, in lonliness to die.

* * * *

In such a predicament, men who knew their job, and could be relied upon to go quietly and purposefully about it, were worth more than their weight in gold. Planters, tea garden medical officers, senior Indian executive staff, thousands of timid but willing and disciplined garden labourers, together with the industry's chief representatives from Calcutta, constituted a *corps d'elite*, upon which the authorities could and did rely for yeomen service. Road making and refugee relief were to a large extent interlocked, but as this part of my story is concerned with relief with a capital R, we may here take more detailed stock of the Dimapur refugee camp, which was the largest and most representative of the ten camps that had by now been established in or around Manipur State during March. By comparison it was rather a show place, because the further forward the relief columns pushed the more primitive became the amenities they were able to provide. But quite apart from size or facilities, Dimapur set the high standard of willing and selfless sacrifice which was to characterise every one of the Indian Tea Association's camps on the three main refugee routes. The camp lay in the playground of a one-storeyed school building about 120 feet long and 15 feet wide. It was located alongside the railway, about 300 yards from the station. The only water was from a tank about 30 yards square, which had shown an omnious drop when Police, Assam Rifles, passing troops and refugees began to draw on it. Quarters for refugees requiring European meals were in the compound of the *dak* bungalow, with tents for the staff and a bamboo structure for feeding. In the early days of March the few refugees requiring European food were able to get a meal of sorts from the station refreshment room, but this supply failed when the railway line became hopelessly congested. A storm blew down the bamboo basha* which was moved to another site. A railway siding swallowed up the second site, and a third site survived till increasing numbers made it necessary to transfer the camp to the school compound. Officially, Dimapur camp was under the Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills, whose headquarters were at Kohima, 46 miles away up the one track hill road to

* Basha = primitive indigenous hut, usually made of bamboo and grass.

Imphal. It was impossible for him to supervise this camp, and equally impossible for the Government of Assam to find a commandant from their hard pressed services. The need of the hour produced the man—Mr. Alexander Beattie, the Manager of Woka Tea Estate, some 50 miles from Dimapur, who was joined by the wife of an officer in the Indian Tea Association's Scientific Institute at Tocklai. By March 12th the latter, with her own servants, had built efficient cooking stoves, secured utensils of all kinds, arranged a supply of bread and stores from shops 100 miles away and, with the help of the wives of garden managers, contrived to manage a daily supply of fresh vegetables—the only fresh vegetables in a military area covering many square miles. To assist her there were other planters' wives, trained for first aid work, and by March 20th it may be said that this department of the Camp was ready to deal with any situation. Beattie's problems were of a different kind. The numbers of refugees were increasing daily. Foodstuffs in Dimapur were scarce and prices, already high, were rising. The school compound offered no shelter for human beings, as all the school rooms were used to keep the foodstuffs dry. It was necessary to build camps to accommodate large numbers, and to prepare for the day when the inflow would exceed the capacity of the night trains to take the refugees away. The refugees in March were still for the most part able-bodied and comparatively well to do, having started from Burma in sufficient time to have made long stretches of the journey northwards to Tamu by train, or boat or lorry. The news of the fighting was not encouraging, and the more ominous silence of the Government of Burma about the numbers moving, made it certain that Dimapur would soon have to deal with the weak and the ailing, the poor and the weary. For Beattie these were problems which called forth all the qualities of this practical minded Scot. He produced two fellow planters, brought in his own garden lorry and his own contingent of 70 garden labourers with their own tools. He took similar services from a neighbouring garden, and imported both Hindu and Mohamedan cooks. Then he secured rice supplies from a rice mill 40 miles away and bought up a large supply of dhal, an article which was rapidly becoming scarce. Likewise he arranged a supply of vegetables and eggs from his own garden and those of his neighbours, and had a supply of milk brought in by special messenger for refugee children. Finally, he brought in four 400 gallon water tanks and in twelve days sank two successful tube wells. In a place where the only representative of the Public Works Department, who could be spared from roads works, was a timid overseer, constantly down with malaria, it was useless to rely on any official

agency for either building work or the materials to build. Beattie and his colleagues imported their own thatch and bamboos, and with their own labour set to work. In two weeks the compound was transformed A road was cut to enable lorries to run in with their loads, whereas previously refugees had been decanted on to the main road, where they had crowded the approaches to the station in their eagerness to see a train that would take them to their destinations. In between camps, transport was the great problem. In the camps themselves, sanitation was problem number one. Dimapur was no exception to the others where, throughout the whole period of this mass migration, camp commadants were continually struggling against the refugees' complete disregard of the people following close behind. Vigorous precautions had to be taken to prevent the Dimapur camp precincts from becoming open sewers. Bamboo mats, frequently renewed, made a flooring. In other lines, bamboo platforms were built for sleeping accommodation. A hospital, open at the sides (the night temperature was never below 70°) was built ; doctors' dispensaries and isolation wards kitchens and offices were made ready. Everything was of a temporary nature, because everyone knew that the refugees could not cross the hills in the monsoon, which was due to break in the hills at the end of May and in the plains early in June. The achievement lay in making shelters in a place where there had been none ; in producing materials from a tract denuded to meet Army requirements ; in bringing labour into a military area where activity was such as to deter the local populace ; and above all, in bringing into this inhospitable region the cheerful spirit of a man whose quiet efficiency was unimpared by the inertia of governments and the waywardness of the military controls. But of comfort there was none.

* * * *

I should at this point say that, quite early in the writing of this story, I realised that if I had to refer by name to every planter who is entitled to honourable mention in these pages, I would probably confuse the general reader and almost certainly omit a few names that should be included. The only way, therefore, has been rigorously to exclude all names from the text except such as are absolutely indespensable to the story. I regard Beattie, however, as one of the most honourable exceptions which validates the rule. We have seen the great part he played at the beginning, and without some mention of him by name it would have been impossible to get the main narrative of this

enterprise launched. Anticipating events, I may record that ultimately he was to give his life in the cause to which he made so valuable and characteristic a contribution. Writing to a friend after Beattie's death in July the Hon'ble Mr. Justice Braund, Refugee Administrator, Shillong, said:

> "Although I left Dimapur myself on the 12th, I heard only yesterday *via* your office, of the death of Mr. Beattie, lately the Camp Commandant at Dimapur. I knew that he had been unwell for some time and that his illness had developed into typhoid and had taken a serious turn. When I was at Dimapur three weeks ago, he was then running a temperature and was obviously unfit and on that account, I urged him to go back to his own tea garden for a time, at least—which he did.
>
> I feel it right that I should let you know . . . . . of the wonderful work that Beattie had done. He has been at Dimapur from the beginning, and his utter steadiness and reliability throughout has been remarkable. Whatever else happened, we always knew that Beattie would still be there doing his work. I cannot tell you what a help that was at a time, in May-June, when the Manipur Organisation was strained to its utmost. As you know, the Dimapur Camp has not been a pleasant place. Close on a hundred and fifty thousand refugees have passed through Beattie's hands there. From May onwards, there was a progressive deterioration in conditions there and the whole camp was inches deep in mud. After the bombing of Imphal, and with the increased pressure of refugee traffic which followed, the physical condition of the refugees grew steadily worse and the means of helping them at Dimapur were all too few. Deaths in the Camp multiplied, and sanitary conditions became appalling. I venture to think that few of those who did not witness these conditions can really realise how bad they were. Yet Beattie went on steadily doing everything in his power, without a day's rest, to see that all that was humanly possible, in these conditions and with the resources at his disposal, was done to get the refugees who came to him safely away, and to care for those who had to stay behind. He worked day and night and I have seen him myself on the station at all hours, always with a kindly word for the distressed, and a pocketful of sweets for the children. He did not spare himself for a moment, and I have met no one—whether refugee or member of his staff—who had not spoken of him in terms of admiration and affection. He never spared himself, and in the end I cannot doubt that he has given his life for the refugees he served."

Mr. Justice Braund's letter constitutes a worthy epitaph to the man who, more than any other, was responsible for the actual day to day dispensation of relief at Dimapur.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND.

IN March there were only six days on which more than 1,000 refugees arrived at Dimapur, but April began to reveal the real shape of things to come. In all 32,000 refugees came through the camp during the month, and on only twelve days did the number of daily arrivals fall below a thousand. Meanwhile, the place itself was undergoing considerable changes. New railway yards were being built, but handling facilities and personnel were still unequal to the task of dealing with the increasing traffic. Locating food supplies in congested yards was a full time job, and transferring them from wagons to camp storehouses required a selected team of Beattie's labourers. This rail congestion soon began to affect the refugee traffic. It was still usually possible to get a train drawn up in the station about 10 p.m. each night. This was very convenient for refugees who had arrived at Dimapur by lorry or bus late in the afternoon; they were given a hot meal in the evening and escorted in good order to the station by the Camp officers, having been given in Camp a railway ticket to their destinations. Issuing a railway ticket was not as simple as it sounds, because so many different languages were used, and an interpreter was required for almost all the refugees whose homes were in South India. In the early days it was found best to issue one ticket for a group of persons going to the same district, and to nominate from amongst them a responsible leader. The train arrangements in March and early April enabled the Camp Commandants to clear the camps each night. Loading trains in partial black out conditions was never easy and the refugees, quite willing to board any train going in any direction, required a good deal of guidance and restraining. By early April every convoy of refugees contained a number of sick and injured. Not all the injuries derived from the ordinary hazards of the trek, and from now on there was no day which did not produce its casualties owing to Army trucks having left the road and rolled down the hillside. At that time Army truck drivers had little or no experience of driving on narrow hill roads, and the wonder is that the casualties were not much heavier. Many were the tales of incredible escapes from death when ten-wheeler trucks plunged 200 feet down a steep hillside; many

were the rescues carried out by parties of tea garden labourers and Naga tribesmen working on the road. To those engaged in the Dimapur Camp the casualties seemed high, because they all arrived in due course at Dimapur, as apart from Kohima there was no other place on the 134 mile journey where anything but somewhat crude first aid could be given. The camp hospital proper at Dimapur was, and always remained, woefully inadequate for dealing with either the injured or the ailing, and it had to entrench, as usual, on the Tea Labour Hospital which had a staff and a drug supply which the Refugee Administration on this route never succeeded in emulating. The casualties and the sick were an entraining problem which taxed the resources of Beattie and his colleagues, but never exhausted either their kindness or their ingenuity, though frequently the work was not completed till 3 a.m. Some observers wondered what happened to the refugees during their long train journey south, now subject to increasing delays, and welcomed, without wholly believing, the assurance from the three members of the Ram Krishna Mission, who were working admirably alongside the planters, that all would be well when they reached Bengal. A Women's Volunteer Service Camp organised by Lady Reid, the wife of the then Governor of Assam, and staffed mainly by planters' wives, was working at the river crossing at Pandu. Another canteen staffed entirely by planters' wives was running a 24-hour service at a half way station. It was hoped that, *en route*, the Government organisation would show more imagination and speed than was in evidence at Dimapur. Meanwhile, stores and rations had to be transported to forward camps on both the routes then operating. On the Tamu-Palel route there were large contingents of Indian Tea Association Labour at work, building the new road to Tamu and the numbers of refugees using this route had been restricted, throwing a considerably greater strain on the Tamu-Woksu-Nangtok route. The camps on this route were being greatly enlarged, and the demands for supplies, particularly of dhal and salt, were heavy. Demands on Army transport were formidable, and refugees had not yet become a formal military responsibility The adjudication of the claims of the Army, the road building and the refugees was an almost impossible task, even when thrust upon the broad shoulders of Major-General Wood. With transport short for everyone, the Refugee Organisation was particularly handicapped, for it alone of these contending parties had no vehicles of its own. Perhaps a layman tends to oversimplify the whole problem, which seemed to resolve itself into a recognition of the fact that Manipur's imports were military supplies and personnel, foodstuffs and labour, and its only

export were refugees. Therefore, the quicker the refugee camps could be supplied the quicker the available transport would be running to capacity both ways. The laymen saw army transport on the up route being wasted by travelling empty or half loaded, because some underling had been told that lorries should be sent without delay to the forward areas. An Indian Tea Association Refugee Officer reports that on one occasion he witnessed a distinguished military engineer standing, Horatius like, at the control bridge counting the unloaded or half loaded lorries going up when the same engineer had been refused lorries to carry tools to build a key bridge beyond Palel. The engineer looked so worried that the Refugee Officer stopped to assist in the count. When the long convoy passed and the gate had been closed, the engineer, whose anger had by now given place to pity, looked sorrowfully at his formidable total of underloaded lorries and relieved his feelings by murmuring Tennyson's line:

" Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers ".

Once more the Indian Tea Association was called on to assist. Early in March about 120 lorries had been requisitioned from tea gardens to the great loss of the industry, and had arrived at Dimapur with their own drivers. The Indian Tea Association quickly began to see that a regular supply of contented labour depended to a very large extent on the Association controlling its own transport, and becoming as independent of military transportation as possible. By the end of March, therefore, it had created its own transport organisation complete with repair shops, mechanics, drivers and loading squads. Lorries operated in convoys of about 25, each convoy in charge of a European planter, whose job it was to see that no space was wasted and no time lost. The arrangement worked admirably. European stores had been arranged for by Major-General Wood, who had insisted on a 40-ton consignment being sent to Dimapur by passenger train under escort. They arrived in April and proved invaluable. The quantity of Indian food needed for the camps was much greater, but was immediately available from the large reserves which had already been built up for the Indian Tea Association road labour earlier in March before the railway delays occurred. Supplies were also regularly coming forward by river steamer routes, not yet congested by military traffic. Thanks, therefore, to the Indian Tea Association transport, garden labourers for loading, and Indian Tea Association stores, the food demands of the large camps were quickly met. Army transport was, of course, also necessary but its availability was always

contingent on military necessities, and it remained true for the next three months that when there was an emergency demand for supplies, the Indian Tea Association were invariably asked to meet the first indents—and did.

* * * *

Communications were always exceedingly difficult, and at the height of the evacuation telegrams between Dimapur and the headquarters of the Assam Government at Shillong were taking as long as six days to reach their destination. The camp at Dimapur relied greatly on Major-General Wood for assistance, which was freely and promptly given, and on the Indian Tea Association for transport, labour and medical aid. The efficiency of the evacuation plans of big firms such as the Burmah Oil Company and Steel Bros., who brought their labour forces out of Burma in carefully organised expeditions led by men who knew the route and the numbers following behind, contrasted sharply with the disarray of the general evacuation. Nor were some of the officers of the Burma Government who came through in April and May very well informed about the routes through which they had passed, the stocks of food in camps or the numbers of refugees following up. The condition of the refugees was now rapidly deteriorating and the cohesion of earlier batches had been lost. Wives had been separated from their husbands, children from their parents, brother's from their sisters. Progress over the hills had been slower than formerly ; there had been inevitable hold-ups at Korengei on account of military convoys. On April 17th Dimapur received 225 refugees and on the next day received 2,000. Such fluctuations persisted and added greatly to the anxieties of those in charge of the camp. Illness was claiming many more victims : the proportion of women and children was increasing : the weak were being left behind to come in as best they could. Numbers were rising steadily, and the capacity of the railway to deal with this traffic falling proportionately. By the end of April there emerged a well nigh intractable problem—the fact that increasing numbers of refugees had made a supreme effort for themselves and their families to reach safety, and having got within sight of their goal were spent to the point of collapse. In many cases it almost seemed as though the sound of a railway engine whistle, or the clang of shunting trucks from the Dimapur yards, was the signal for the human body to let go. Dimapur could never be a rest camp, in spite of orders to make it a place of " superior comfort ". It was built on a cramped site near a station in a target area, with wholly inadequate medical facilities.

It was therefore a dispersal camp, which could only function if refugees were despatched at speed If the collapsed cases lingered two or three days they would die, as indeed many did. It was not so much a physical collapse, for many were in fair condition, as a spiritual and psychological breakdown which, in the case of men, often took little account of dependents travelling with them. Untimely rain in mid-April made Dimapur a veritable quagmire, and round the refugee camp which could be expanded no further, a new military base was taking shape. Military stores, engineering materials, motor trucks and a new army competed with the wounded of the old Burma Army, tired units of that gallant force, civilian refugees, tea garden coolies and relief workers, for the limited facilities of this small and ill-equipped place. However, there were compensations. Government had at last reinforced the refugee camp with a number of young Indian assistant commandants, who quickly became infected with Beattie's admirable spirit and worked hard both day and night. As it was only possible to give emergency treatment to most of the cases of sick and injured, many of the latter were sent in refugee trains to the American Baptist Mission Hospital at Gauhati which maintained a 24-hour service and set a standard of nursing and medical skill which is gratefully remembered in all parts of India. The Dimapur cemetry grew, an so did the improvised creche where mothers and new born infants presented less difficulty than the orphans. Some of the latter had made their way under their own steam from as far away as the Chindwin. On April 28th the Bishenpur-Silchar overflow route was declared open for the reasonably physically fit. The selection was done at a place called Thobal, between Imphal and Palel, and from Thobal the fit were taken by lorry to Bishenpur to start their 86 mile march to Silchar. The result of this was quickly apparent at Dimapur, where early in May there came an influx of refugees in worse condition than any received before, Malaria had obviously taken its toll of their diminished strength and relief workers were left to wonder how they had managed to journey thus far, and how they were going to do a further journey by train which in many cases would take another ten days. The pressure on camp space and on train accommodation was such that every available open wagon was used for shelter, though this often meant exposure to rain for several hours. May 10th marked the end of a chapter, for on that date Imphal was heavily bombed. Two days later Kalewa, which was the last control station on the Chindwin Valley on the way to Tamu, was abandoned. The order was given by the Administrator-General to wind up the camps on the Tamu-Palel and Tamu-Woksu-Heirok routes. General Alexan-

der's retreating army had succeeded in reaching the frontier, and the flood gates for refugees were open.

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With the Dimapur and outlying camps full to overflowing, waves of refugees banking up at Korengei and beyond, I.T.A. labour camps stretching over 170 miles of road construction and housing 30,000 tea garden labourers, the strain on the personnel of the tea industry had become pretty severe by early May. Owing to shortage of rail transport, the Dimapur relief organisation was to some extent losing ground, for the camp was now acquiring an increasing number of immovable refugees. These were the grievously ill, the weak and incapacitated and large families and aged dependents. In the air-raid on Imphal on May 10th the so-called European camp had been hit, and about 20 evacuees together with Mrs. Shaw, the lady worker in charge of the camp, were killed. Fortunately, no bombs fell on the adjacent large Indian camp at Korengei, but the attack started an exodus of 10,000 refugees marching down the main road to Dimapur with no food and against the rising tide of military traffic moving up to the frontier. This panic was to have repercussions on Dimapur extending over another month, but the immediate effect of the Imphal bombing at Dimapur was that almost all the menials fled along with certain other subordinate personnel, including some railway and postal staff. Rail receipts, mails and telegrams were irrecoverable for days, and the post office just closed down. It may be conceded that there was some cause for alarm, as Dimapur had now acquired a certain military significance ; but in the view of those who stayed a hurried abandonment on the scale which took place, because of bombs dropped 134 miles away, seemed somewhat out of proportion. With a second bombing of Imphal on May 16th, the cup of joy at Dimapur may be said to have become full to overflowing. The arrival, invariably by night of casualties from Imphal needing attention at the camp hospital, together with an unfortunate series of fractures and other injuries caused by lorries over-running the hill road and finishing many feet down the cliff sides, provided another crisis for which an immediate answer was found. The casualties were turned over to the Tea Labour Hospital and their doctors worked magnificently on cases which the camp's overworked but efficient Sub-Assistant Surgeon could not possibly tackle. During these grim days the camp population on some nights exceeded 5,000. Conservancy staff numbered 5 (two of whom were employed merely in burying the dead) and duty hours for Beattie and his assistants stretched far through the night. It was in

such circumstances that the hard pressed band of workers were greatly cheered by two communications from Government asking first how many refugees coming through would be willing to accept work on the Road, and what A.R.P. measures, apart from slit trenches, had been devised for the camp. Few official enquiries, to which the answer was 'Nil', 'Nil', can ever have had so little relevance to the facts of life, or so supremely demonstrated the indestructibility of red tape.

But there were miracles also, for during the period May 10th to 27th there were only two days rain, and the morass temporarily disappeared. This good fortune was badly needed, for many of the refugees now arriving could barely drag themselves to the camp lines. The medical control staff at Tamu and beyond, set up by the Assam Government under Colonel Taylor, I.M.S., must have done a fine job in inoculating every refugee against cholera, for there were amazingly few cases of cholera amongst refugees though dysentery, cerebral malaria, and occasional cases of small-pox were occurring. So far, however, there was no epedemic.

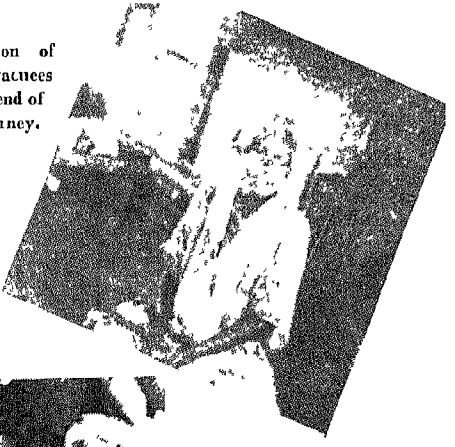
The surging stream of refugees from Korengei, trudging down a heavily encumbered road on which there was neither food nor shelter, brought an appeal from Mr. Justice Braund and his team working in Manipur for rations to be sent by lorry and dropped in dumps on the road side. From the Political Agent came a similar request to renew the stocks of food at Bishenpur, now that this route was working to capacity. The bombing of Imphal had caused a good many drivers of civilian lorries to leave for home. Their vehicles were thus immobilised at a time when it was more than ever necessary to have transport; for refugee traffic had reached its peak, and the amount of military transport available for refugees was less than ever. Remember that the exhausted Burma Army had crossed the frontier and a new army was still coming up into position. Once more the I.T.A. transport organisation came to the rescue. A large number of tea garden labourers, who had been recruited for a period of two months, had just been repatriated, thereby freeing a quantity of I.T.A. transport. With a planter engineer in charge of convoys of ten or more, lorries loaded with foodstuffs were accordingly sent forward. Unlike certain other convoys, these arrived at their destination with the full quantity of foodstuffs which had been promised, and they brought back refugees with speed and safety. Actually the foodstuffs these lorries could take up were a good deal more important than the small numbers of refugees they could bring back, and refugee transport remained a problem which only the Army could tackle.

The Administrator-General's decision to wind up the camps on the Tamu-Woksu-Heirok route in mid-May, brought to Dimapur the last of the I.T.A. Commandants from the forward camps, and left Dimapur as the only camp where I.T.A. officers were still working It remained for some time the most important on the route. Each of the returning camp officers bore marks of the strain of life in the forward camps. All had lost weight and were in heavy arrears of sleep ; most had suffered or were suffering from dysentery. They had, however, lost fewer days from malaria than any other group of workers, civil or military. All were agreed that nothing in their experience approached the misery they had seen, but this had been redeemed for them by the amazing endurance of people of poor physique. They had seen the ugly side of human nature—and dealt with it ; but they had witnessed more courage and kindliness than cowardice and cruelty. Their duties, particularly in the early stages, had covered a wide field. They had assisted the camps' medical staff at births and had to bury the dead ; they had also acted as doctors, nurses and policemen. Up to this date the majority of refugees had had few contacts with the Japanese invaders of Burma. Many had undoubtedly made wide detours to avoid dangers that did not exist, and those who had suggestions to make all stressed the need for better information from the Burma side about numbers, camps, rations, water supply and routes.

In the hills, the middle of May brought with it an unusually early monsoon, and heavy rain added to the difficulties of camp workers on the tracks and the transport drivers on the road. With the official abandonment of the routes from Tamu, refugees came over the hills by the tracks which started from Homolin about 60 miles north of Tamu. From Homolin there are ill-defined paths over what is called the Somra Tract, but hitherto these had only been used by political officers making rare visits in the cold, dry weather with escorts and teams of experienced porters. For debilitated refugees to attempt these at the beginning of the rains was a desperate venture, and the further north the refugees moved the more difficult the mountain tracks became. These tracks were not stocked with food, and supplies had to be sent out hurriedly by any porters who could be persuaded to attempt the job. In Dimapur there began to be heard new names for the routes which started at Homolin in Burma. Parties were said to be crossing the mountains to Kohima. Others *via* Yarapok to Thobal or to Mao at mile 68 on the Imphal road ; and others *via* Ukrul to Imphal. With the closing of the route camp officers had now been withdrawn from all forward camps, except that the Bishenpur route was still manned by I.T.A. officers and

A selection of earlier evacuees at the end of the journey.

Two British soldiers at Lekhapani



An elderly Indian lady.

ABOVE *The baby on the left was eleven weeks old when carried out of Burma*

Searching evacuees

BELOW *Juvenile refugees who made the long journey safely.*

A party after reaching railhead.

Mainly Personal.

Assistant Medical Officer Banerjee of the I.T.A.

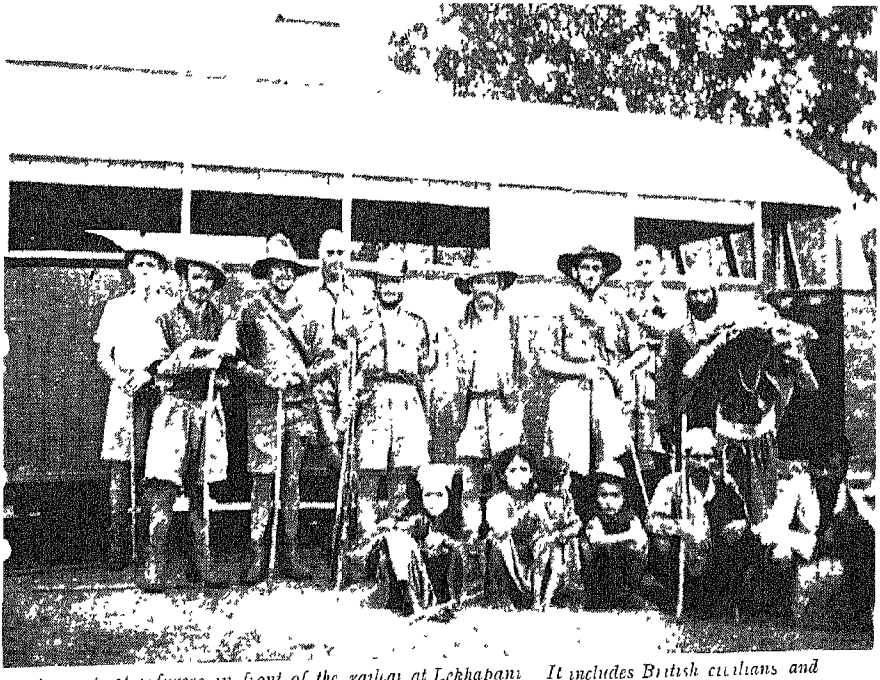
A monkey was amongst the early arrivals

ABOVE *Messrs Ross, Rose and Smyth*

Capt Ramsay Tamish at headquarters

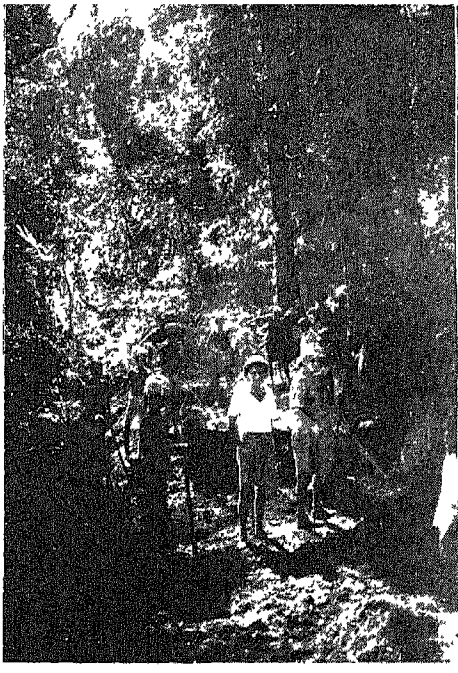
BELOW *Tanbuk Irang, an Abor volunteer who won the George Medal for bringing a woman and child to safety in circumstances of great difficulty.*

Stores being unloaded at railhead.



A group of refugees in front of the railway at Lokhapani It includes British civilians and soldiers and Indian labourers and Gurkha children whilst at the back are Watson Hodson and Connell of the relief organisation

BELOW *Tea District Labour Association gangs being withdrawn pass tea garden porter parties on the Jeep Road Hard tracks have been won on each side but the centre is a morass*



The "road" from Namchick to Kumlao.

Coolies at work in the jungle.

Another view of the jungle route

The doctor's bungalow at Namchick

working to capacity. Road-making projects were swallowing up all the planters who could be spared, and the Indian Tea Association's help was limited to loading foodstuffs and sending these forward in garden lorries under escort to wherever they were needed. In particular, it was these convoys which saved the situation at Bishenpur for the three camps immediately beyond Bishenpur, which could only be stocked at Manipur, had exhausted their rations. Manipur, called on to meet the demand of the northern routes from Homolin, could not simultaneously renew the Bishenpur supplies, and the aid given from Dimapur enabled the I.T.A. camps further west to pass 37,500 refugees to safety by the Bishenpur route.

* * * *

Between May 27th and June 17th, 30,000 refugees passed through Dimapur. On May 30th, 3,200 refugees arrived, but thereafter the monsoon weather in the hills made most routes impassable, and numbers declined steadily. In June the camp continued to receive those who had come over the appalling northern routes, estimated at 25,000 in all. They had been delayed by rain and shortage of lorries and along with the refugees who had broken camp at Korengei, after the bombing of Imphal, had set off to walk, and arrived in bad shape. Many of the latter had taken refuge in any shelter they could erect on the road side and waited for lorries—or death. The emergency dumps of food set up at various places on the road saved many lives, and military lorries brought in the survivors. On June 4th a member of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee arrived with nine volunteers Unlike an earlier unit the new party gave invaluable assistance when the need was great, and provided regular escorts for the sick and the orphans, who were sent with every train to the American Mission Hospital at Gauhati. A more completely equipped Congress Medical Mission under Dr. Bose arrived from Calcutta some days later, and for the next month they supplemented the work of the camp medical staff to a degree which made all regret that they had not arrived two months earlier. By the middle of June the decline in the number of incoming refugees was spectacular, and not even the estimates of overwrought stragglers revealed the presence of crowds behind. With the evacuation of the Burma Army completed and the departure to their homes of the first contingent of garden labour, the congestion on the railway had eased. The non-walking cases were more numerous than ever before, but the Camp staff had also increased and were able to give them

more attention and assistance. On June 27th Beattie handed over charge of a camp that was practically empty. From that date to the end of July only 1,000 more refugees were to come through Dimapur. Beattie, who had never lost a day through illness, was by then ailing and needed help to reach home. He had contracted typhoid, from which he died on July 12th. Directly or indirectly, approximately 150,000 refugees owed a very great deal to the loving care with which he administered the affairs of the camp. The Refugee Administration estimate that the following numbers of refugees passed through Dimapur:

February	7,000
March	25,000
April	36,000
May	51,000
June	28,000
July	1,000

* * * *

Before I close this part of the story a word must be said about the Bishenpur-Jirighat-Silchar overflow route, which from start to finish was almost entirely an Indian Tea Association concern. As I have already mentioned, it was opened and brought into operation at the end of April—a far-sighted decision for which the credit goes to the Political Agent at Manipur who, as far back as February, had foreseen a breakdown of transport between Imphal and Dimapur. This was a piece of planning which for simplicity and effectiveness stands out at a moment when there was more than a little indecision and vagueness, particularly on the Burma side of the border. The Bishenpur-Jirighat-Silchar route followed a bridle path for 86 miles at right angles to a line of parallel mountain ranges. The water supply was ample, but the only way to ration the six camps between the western supply base at Fullertol and the eastern base at Bishenpur was by porters and pack transport. The three western camps were the entire responsibility of the Surma Valley Branch of the Indian Tea Association, whose Secretary called on garden managers for service as Camp Commandants and on garden labour for service as porters. In spite of the difficult terrain, camps at Jiribam, Makru and Barak were built and rationed for 2,000 refugees daily, all the building and most of the porterage being done by garden labour, working with their own European managers and alongside their own medical staff from the gardens. When Major-General Wood wisely ordered supplies to be increased, so

that the camps could handle 3,000 refugees daily, rations, elephants, ponies, bullocks and village labour were brought in to help the porters with such success that the route was opened on April 28th in circumstances which I have already described, some refugees being diverted at Thobal on the Palel-Imphal Road and others being sent from Imphal to Bishenpur. At first an attempt was made to send only those refugees who were obviously fit enough to walk another 90 miles, but later it was impossible to maintain any selection. This route closed at Bishenpur on June 5th, and the last sick case arrived at the western base camp on June 25th. Approximately 37,500 reached safety through camps where rest was possible and which it was not necessary to clear each morning; where rations were plentiful and more varied than on any other route; where plans had been made in advance and where the minimum improvisation was necessary. There was a dispersal camp at Silchar, competently organised by the Deputy-Commissioner. Here there was a conservancy service, and an electrically lit camp on a wide open site, hot meals of quality none of the refugees had enjoyed since leaving their homes in Burma, an ample medical staff, a W.V.S. Unit which distributed clothes and comforts to the needy, and a railway station which was a branch terminus with trains which left from platforms at stated times, and in which seats for every refugee could be found. The deaths amongst the refugees using this route were 1,011 or 2.69 per cent., a figure which compares favourably with the deaths on the all lorry route to Dimapur—an eloquent tribute to the quality of the organisation which functioned on this 90 mile march. The awareness of the Political Agent who in February conceived the idea, the organising ability of those who planned its details and with the help of garden labourers and their managers and medical staff carried it out; the insistence of Major-General Wood that it should be maintained at its maximum carrying capacity together with the administrative skill at the dispersal camp, and the activities of a number of voluntary organisations, provided a combination which those who worked in the squalor and chaos of Dimapur never saw—and if Camp Commandants of forward camps are to be believed, never existed towards and over the Burma frontier, except in the plans of the big industrial companies who brought out their own employees.

CHAPTER V.

OVER THE PANGSAU.

THE closure of the Burma Road to Kunming in March 1942 had been the signal for the commencement of two frontier road projects, designed to make use of the few natural advantages presented by the little known and forbidding Hukawng route, joining Burma and India. Then, as now, it was not possible to disclose the full political and strategic purposes of these two undertakings, but it can be recorded that, as Government's chief road-makers, the Indian Tea Association was actively engaged in both of them. By the second week of May the deterioration in the military situation in Burma, and the approach of the monsoon, made it necessary to reconsider future policy in respect of both these operations. It was decided to close down all work on the longer term of the two road projects, but to continue with unabated vigour on the other—a shorter range undertaking which offered an escape to safety for the large number of evacuees who were now reported to be endeavouring to force their way through the Hukawng Valley and over the Pangsau Pass from north-eastern Burma. Apart from the perilous and relatively small scale evacuation *via* the Chaukan Pass, with which I deal in the closing chapters of this book, the Hukawng Valley was regarded as the only other practical alternative land exit from Burma, now that it was no longer possible to come out *via* the Chindwin-Tamu-Dimapur route. First news of a possible evacuation by the Pangsau Pass, which forms a formidable hazard on the Hukawng Valley route, actually reached the I.T.A's chief representative on the road operations adjacent to this now historic refugee route on May 4th, and he acted with customary promptitude. Imphal was bombed on May 10th and, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the event produced something like a crisis in the relief operations which were being carried out on the southern routes, which had Dimapur as their chief outlet. For the moment, the Indian Tea Association's resources in men and material were strained almost to breaking point, but it was unthinkable that the latest call for help should go unanswered. No definite details were available, but the numbers of refugees likely to make the attempt by this least hospitable of the three chief evacuation routes was calculated at not more than 10,000——a figure which once again

proved to be far short of the actual total. A preliminary conference on May 12th with the Administrator-General Eastern Frontier Projects, who now filled the additional office of Refugee Administrator, produced the outline of a scheme for dealing with the struggling mass of human beings, who were making their way to India *via* the Pangsau Pass under conditions of almost indescribable horror. As yet little was known of their privations, or the mental and physical anguish in which most of the journey had to be accomplished. As the full story unfolded itself, however, it was abundantly evident that relief measures would call for stout hearts, clear heads and speedy action. At the conference Major-General Wood explained quite frankly that the other demands upon the Army were so urgent that he had no choice but to ask the I.T.A. to take over the work of dealing with the refugees from Tipong forward——a responsibility which was accepted without hesitation. I have already touched upon the predicament of thousands of hapless refugees after the end of the air evacuation from Myitkyina. The great majority of them set out for Shinbiwyang, and this frontier village, normally the headquarters of a junior political officer, by mid-May constituted the main starting point of the new evacuation route to India. A reference to the diagrammatic map will help the reader to understand the alignment of the new route. It was arranged that the first four camps from Shinbiwyang should be supplied and staffed from Burma. The Assam effort would try to reach Taikham Zup. The I T.A. camps, following an old opium track, were to be as follows :—Lekhapani (base), Tipong, Tirap, Kumlao, Fuffalo (Ngokpi), Namchick, Namky, Namgoi, Nampong, Pahari, (the Pangsau Pass), Shamlung, Nawngyang Tagung Hka*, Ngalang Ga †, Namlip, Yangsung, Taikham Zup ‡. The most forward camp, already built for road work by the I.T.A. was at Nampong. It was now necessary to send parties forward to establish camps at the above named places between Nampong and Taikham Zup, and advance parties were prepared, each consisting of two I.T.A. Liaison Officers, one Sub-Assistant Surgeon, one dresser, twelve menials and fifty Arbor porters. Actually Liaison Officers did not always wait for a full advance party to assemble, but went straight on with such porters as they could collect I may here mention that the title "Liaison Officer", which is used extensively throughout this part of my story, derives from the nomenclature of the road-making projects. In theory, Royal Engineers, or Indian Engineers as the case might be, were responsible for the planning of military road construction, whilst

* Hka=river † Ga= village ‡ Zup = confluence

planters would act as Liaison Officers in managing labour and carrying out the actual work. Liaison Officers were drawn not only from Assam itself, but also from the Dooars and Darjeeling and even as far afield as Southern India.

But to return to the actual business of relief. It was hoped that camps forward, or eastward, of the Pangsau Pass would each be able to give shelter to 500 refugees per night. For camps on the western, or Indian, side of the Pass the accommodation which had already been built for labour engaged on road work was available, as the labour itself was being withdrawn as a result of the decision to suspend part of the road operations. Incidentally, it may be remarked that here, as elsewhere, labour was extremely sensitive to the presence of evacuees, which almost always resulted in uneasiness and defections amongst the coolies. As soon as evacuees began to arrive on the Shinbiwyang-Ledo Section of the Hukwang Valley route much of the labour which was still required for extra porterage, camp maintenance and track repairs began to fade away. On the Indian side of the Pangsau Pass the supply, or commissariat, problem was relatively straightforward and manageable. Forward of the Pass, however, the provisioning of camps with food, fuel and medical requirements presented an entirely different task. It was decided that the Royal Air Force would co-operate by dropping large quantities of stores at Shinbiwyang, and at certain camps between there and the Pangsau. Apart from this, every effort was to be made to push forward European and Indian stores by ground transport, though porterage was never wholly satisfactory. On medical advice special dietaries were drawn up for both Europeans and Indians, and arrangements made to send forward by boat, elephant, mule and porter enough supplies for evacuees totalling 9,500 Indian and 500 European food eating persons, this being regarded as the absolute maximum which could be expected to come through. Supplemented by food dropped by plane, the whole constituted a transportation achievement of no small dimensions. On the medical side, arrangements were made all along the road from the base camp at Lekhapani by the Principal Medical Officer of the Indian Tea Association, and European and Indian doctors, with their subordinate staffs, moved forward to the most advanced camps with quantities of drugs, medicines and medical comforts.

On May 6th an I.T.A. Liaison Officer in company with an officer of the Burma Service of Engineers, began a ground reconnaissance of the new route, from which it was possible to glean some idea of the terrain over which thousands of refugees were to make their way on foot in steadily worsening conditions

in succeeding months. Unlike the refugees, both these men were in good physical condition, and were able to proceed at a brisk pace. It took them four days, from the 6th to the 10th of May, to make the journey from the base camp at Lekhapani to Nampong, from which point they went forward with a party of seventy Nagas. The trail then led up 900 ft. *via* a Pahari Porter camp to the Naga village of Nongki, from where they made the ascent over the Pangsau Pass, which is more than 4,000 ft. high. Descending on the Burma side, they reached Shamlung and built a small camp on the far side of Nawngyang Hka This camp, about 13 miles from Nampong, was 2,000 ft. up. The river was slow moving but deep, and had to be crossed by raft. On the Burma side there was a treacherous strip of marsh and the road, if it could be so designated, was a quagmire for half a mile. The Nawngyang Hka flows from a large lake with marshy surroundings, which is clearly visible to the west as one passes over the Pangsau Pass. From the Nawngyang Hka to the Tagung Hka is a distance of eight miles, and the party passed through a small deserted camp, which had presumably been built during military operations in the previous cold weather. Here the gradient was very steep, and later it was to prove a gruelling climb for even the fittest of the refugees. At Ngalang Ga, a further eight miles on, they built a small camp on a hill top and pressed on to Namlip, where they bridged the Namlip Hka and a small tributary. On May 13th the first evacuees arrived at Namlip. They consisted of a small party headed by a businessman and an official of the Burma Public Works Department. On the following day the wife of the Political Officer at Shinbiwyang came in with a number of Naga porters and 23 British troops. Altogether 300 men, women and children arrived at Namlip that day, and the evacuation proper on this route may be said to have begun from this date.

* * * *

Actually three or four officers of the Burma Government had made the Shinbiwyang-Ledo journey a few days before the above mentioned reconnaissance was undertaken, and they were by no means optimistic as to the success of any mass exodus by this route. I have had an opportunity of reading the diary which was kept by one of the officers who did the reconnaissance from the Assam end and as some of the points made by the writer are of more than purely technical interest, I venture to reproduce them here, because they show the extremely adverse conditions under which the Shinbiwyang evacuation began and, in perspective therefore, are a clue to the grim circumstances in which it

developed and ultimately ended. The road on both sides of the Pangsau Pass was little more than a mule track, but at the beginning of May it had not yet deteriorated into a veritable sea of mud which rivalled the quicksands of Passchendale. Even so, the writer complained of extremely heavy going in sheets of monsoon rain, which was made none the easier by trouble with the porters whose regular desertions were attributed by the party's interpreter as being due to fear of "the head choppings" reported to be going on further up the road. The porters created their own special problems, which were not merely psychological. In a previous chapter I have referred to what I called the incremental factor—the porterage required to maintain other porters in the field. Here, on the Ledo-Shinbiwyang evacuation route, continuous porter traffic quickly turned an earth track into turgid liquid mud, a possibility which was noted by the writer of the reconnaissance diary. Incidentally, the quality of the porters varied considerably. Pnars are condemned as "a miserable lot", and Abors are regarded as far superior in stamina and behaviour. Here is a cameo from the diary. It says a great deal in a very few words:

> "These last two days have given us a real idea of the conditions under which evacuees are travelling from Burma over these hills; stiff marches in rain over muddy parts, hundreds of leeches, evacuees arriving tired and then having to build shelters for the night, sleeping in wet blankets if they can sleep when there are so many sandflies and other insects that bite, trying to light a fire and cook a breakfast in the rain . . . . . it seems highly improbable that many will get through unless this rain ceases."

The forecast thus given was accurate enough, as far as it went. In point of fact the writer of the reconnaissance diary could not then be expected to know that death, bereavement and disease would later hang like a pall over the straggling convoys of exhausted human beings, battling slowly on against ill-health and the worst that the elements could do.

One has to remember the circumstances in which the majority of the refugees began the journey from Shinbiwyang to Ledo, in addition to its ever increasing discomfiture and hazards But for the events of the summer of 1942, Shinbiwyang itself would probably never have been heard of, except by a handful of specialists in frontier affairs. For it was nothing but a small political outpost, consisting of a bare half dozen thatched bamboo huts. From here a young Political Officer called North administered the local Kachin and Naga tribesmen With him were half a dozen armed police. From the beginning of May this extremely primitive village, devoid of food supplies, sanitation or the most

elementary communal amenities became the main junction of the flood tide of the evacuation that had set in by the north-eastern route to India. Shinbiwyang was the focal point on which refugees from Myitkyina, Sumprambum, Mogaung and other places in Upper Burma converged. It was the merest village and completely lacking in everything necessary to support a population which numbered, not dozens, but thousands by the middle of May. One who should know has told me that, towards the end, death and disease had combined to turn Shinbiwyang into a veritable charnel house. Brigadier Whitworth who, amongst other duties, was in charge of the air dropping of supplies, has estimated that during a period of five months some 45,000 refugees and Chinese soldiers came to Shinbiwyang "some to stay there and die, some to die in the jungles further on, but the majority to gain India and safety"*, for which no little share of the credit is due to the relief organisation which the Indian Tea Association was energetically pushing forward in the face of difficulties of all kinds. It is difficult to find words to describe the resourcefulness and courage of North himself A relatively junior officer of the civil government, he found himself confronted with a situation that would have turned many a more experienced man's reason. But throughout the long monsoon months he stuck to his post in Shinbiwyang, and by his personal example and the exercise of strict discipline and an iron will he prevented a tragedy from becoming a wholesale disaster. At one period with both Chinese troops and refugees on his hands, North's troubles were almost insupportable. The death rate amongst the refugees had risen to fifty a day, and North was having great difficulty in burying the corpses, whilst the Chinese, armed but hungry, were disposed to demand more than their fair share of the very limited quantities of food available. But he carried manfully on, and for services to his fellow men, which rank with the great epics of seige warfare, a grateful government rewarded him with the M.B E.

From the beginning malaria, dysentery and other tropical diseases abounded in Shinbiwyang, and North had nothing to treat them with but the somewhat tenuous and irregular medical supplies that were dropped to him by air, whilst it was most difficult for him to communicate with the outside world. A *dak* runner system was ultimately established, by which messages could reach them, and in the end I believe a small wireless set was installed. It was a continuing disadvantage that, for a long time, those who were planning the strategy of relief from the

* Lecture at the Royal Central Asian Society, July 14th, 1943.

Indian end were very much in the dark as to the precise conditions in Shinbiwyang. All that was known was that they were ghastly in the fullest meaning of the word, and that the morale and physique of the evacuees was correspondingly lowered by the time they began the last and most difficult lap of the journey to India.

The first parties to traverse the Shinbiwyang-Ledo route came through in fairly good physical fettle, but were generally in a highly strung mental condition. As the monsoon became the dominant climatic factor, however, health and strength began to ebb. In contrast with the country between Tirap and Ledo, from which the sky was constantly visible, the track immediately westward of Shinbiwyang ran through dense jungle and over a series of ridges. Brigadier Whitworth, who flew over it several times, says it was quite impossible to follow its route, though short pieces of path were visible at odd intervals. For the most part the foothold was of red sticky clay, running through miles of dark green tunnel. As the monsoon increased in strength the surface became progressively worse, until people sank in it up to their thighs and strong men might make a maximum of seven miles a day. I have been told that there was only one thing worse than sinking slowly into this exceedingly adhesive mud, and that was falling into it face downwards Few things on the journey were more demoralising or exhausting than this, and after it had happened two or three times the weaker ones would give up trying altogether and lay where they had fallen—waiting for death to end their misery, unless they were rescued. A little over half way, at Tagap Ga, there was an open spur, where a large collection of refugees could generally be seen from the air. In front of them lay the Namyung River, in flood and roughly speaking impassable during the monsoon months, but also subject to sharp and unexpected modifications in depth and strength, which enabled some to make the perilous crossing in the course of which the lives of others, less fortunate, were lost. The Namyung River can rise and fall about three feet in an hour, and intermissions as to the depth and strength of the current generally took place during the rare spells of fine weather between the middle of May and the middle of July. At the shallowest point of the ford used by the refugees there was generally not more than a few feet of water—variously described to me as any depth up to eight feet. But it was exceedingly cold and the current was very swift, whilst on the bottom were loose, round boulders which provided a most insecure footing, if and when they could be used for this purpose. A friend has shown me a rough record of the rainfall of the period during which evacuation

over the Namyung was at its height. From May 12th to May 28th it rained almost continuously, as is usual in the first onset of the monsoon. But the weather was fine from the latter date till June 3rd. Thereafter, there was heavy rain again until June 10th, followed by four more days clear weather. From June 14th to June 21st there was rain again, with a particularly heavy fall on June 18th. Heavy showers fell up to June 25th, but between that date and July 3rd there was a definite spell of fine weather, with heavy rain ensuing until July 12th, following which there was a drier spell of five days. So that nobody could hope to make the whole, or any substantial part, of the journey from Shinbiwyang under anything approaching favourable weather conditions. It is probable that during these better intervals the Namyung fell to depths which made a crossing possible, but still terribly dangerous. For, to the end, it remained one of the most dreaded of the many hazards on this route, and it played a very important part in the progress of the whole evacuation, during the early stages of which a scene of great gallantry was witnessed. Regular air dropping of food had not then commenced, and hundreds of refugees were waiting on the river bank. It seemed that they would have to cross or die of starvation. A party of Gurkhas volunteered to take a rope, improvised from rattan cane, across the sinister swift flowing waters. Not all of them were swimmers. Twelve set out, of whom only seven reached the far bank alive; but the rope spanned the river and with its help many refugees were rafted across. The names of those who died are not known, but the Indian Army and Nepal may well be proud of them. It seems clear that after food began to be dropped from the air in regular quantities, if refugees had been prepared to wait for the river to fall (as it did from time to time), not only would there have been fewer deaths from drowning, but many would have been able to continue the journey with a supply of rations. As it was, it was quite common to see refugees hurling themselves into the torrent in their anxiety to push forward. If, under such conditions, they were fortunate enough to reach the other bank they were usually without kit and without food, and thus still further handicapped for the many trials that still lay ahead.

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By now the reader will have listed in his own mind the main factors which dominated the evacuation by the Ledo-Shinbiwyang route, at least so far as the refugees themselves were concerned. Life, in the midst of death, in Shinbiwyang undoubtedly

acted as a spur to go forward, but it provided few of the amenities necessary to prepare for a journey that was to tax to the limit the staying power of everyone that undertook it. A halt at this ill-fated place was inescapable, and most people left it reduced in body and in spirit. Then again, from the beginning of May, the monsoon rains were developing with increasing force and violence. Quite apart from the effect upon the person, the rains quickly reduced the track underfoot to a veritable quagmire, and day by day progress became slower and slower, each succeeding party moving at slower pace than the one in front. At whatever standard one might have been living before one left Burma, some degree of malnutrition on the journey out was inevitable. At the beginning of the evacuation by the Ledo route the incidence of serious disease was not high, but it mounted rapidly, and in later pages I deal in more detail with this aspect of the matter. By May 20th evacuation was in full swing—some four days earlier than had been calculated at the conference with the Administrator-General on the 12th. Fortunately, well grounded preliminary measures had been taken, and in addition to the forward reconnaissance party at Namlip, parties of I.T.A. Liaison Officers and medical staff had assembled at Nampong. Two Liaison Officers and a medical party set out over the Pangsau on May 15th, and on the Pass they met some British other ranks who were coming through at a tremendous pace, having marched from Shinbiwyang, a distance of 133 miles, in six days. But from the beginning the porterage situation was extremely tricky. At this particular juncture there was a high percentage of sickness, particularly amongst Garos and Pnars. Coming down the road was a steadily swelling stream of refugees, with stragglers and lost units of General Alexander's army as well. Many British and Indian troops had been prematurely released from hospital. Eye-witnesses describe them as being thin as skeletons and clad in rags. Some were without boots, and all were striding or struggling through the mud with only one object—to reach civilisation again. The Indians were mostly Sikhs and Punjabis of the Burma Frontier Force. Some of these were mounted infantry, and had brought with them their wiry little 14 hand ponies which were now almost skin and bone, often lame or suffering from saddle sores and girth galls. Only the courage of these brave little beasts kept them going. Those who had pack animals, and gave them the maximum amount of attention in admittedly difficult circumstances were paid a handsome dividend in transport. Good leadership was also a pearl of great price. Amongst the early arrivals on the road was a signal detachment of the Burma Frontier Force, about 150 strong, who came through

in excellent order under a Major with British and Indian N.C O's. A small but highly disciplined body of Chin troops likewise impressed everyone who passed them on the road.

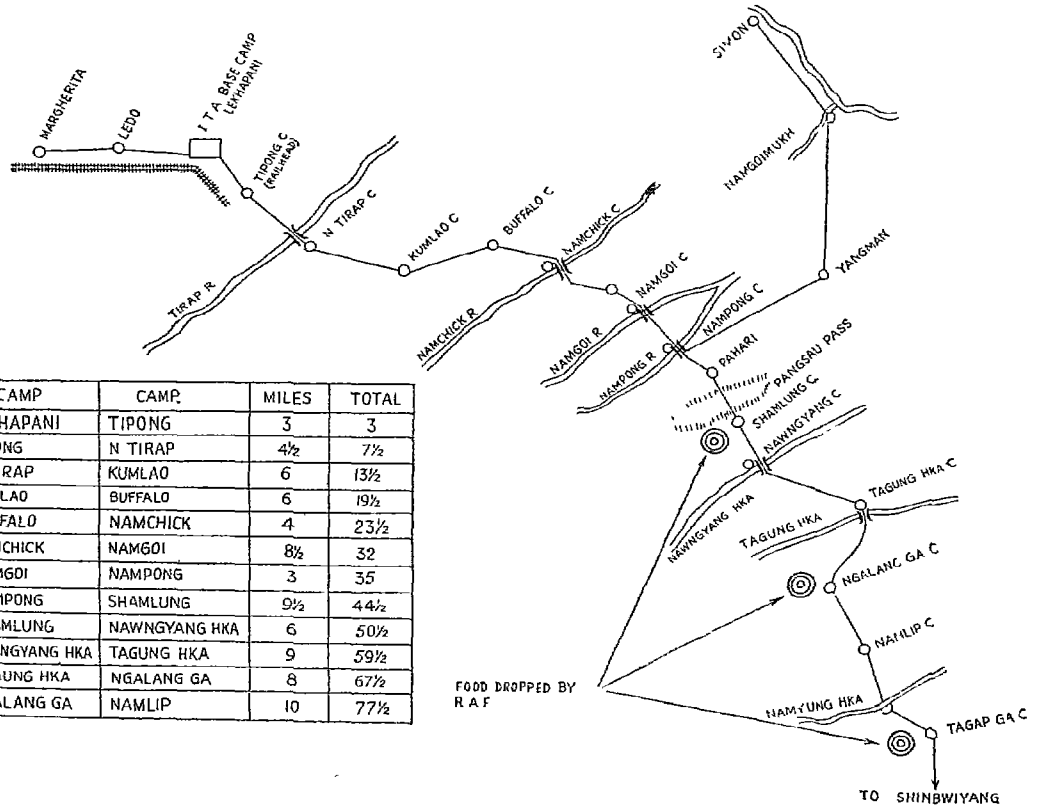
There was rain, always rain and mud and soaking jungle. Beyond North Tirap the track had sadly deteriorated within a few days. Many a relatively fit man had to be rescued from the mud, in which he might find himself imprisoned waist high. For the refugees staggering from camp to camp, the only cheerful sight was that of porters plodding forward with rations and accompanied by Liaison Officers on duty on the route. The latter often had to go out, with lanterns and rescue parties, long after nightfall to rescue those who had fallen by the wayside and been unable to reach camp before dark A mule company under a British officer and two Indian Viceroy's Commissioned officers had arrived on the scene, and was doing a fine bit of work in easing the supply and porterage situation. With jingling chains and swaying loads, they galloped through patches of quagmire, and would frequently take the almost vertical fifteen foot slope at the bottom of the ironically named Golden Stairs at full stretch. The men led, or followed, as best they could, often hanging on to the tail of their animal. But the pace was too hot to last, and by the end of June there was 75 per cent. sickness amongst both animals and men. Nevertheless, the mule company relieved the transport situation at a most critical time, when porterage was at a premium, and before the arrival of fresh gangs of labour from the tea gardens.

The Namyung was not the only river of size in spate on the route. On May 20th an I.T.A. Liaison Officer and an Assistant Political Officer, with 60 Nagas, made an only partially successful attempt to take stores forward to the Nawngyang, a river situated on the Burma side of the Pangsau, and only slightly less menacing than the Namyung. On arrival, on the west bank they met an awe-inspiring sight. On the near side was a steep bank sloping down to the water, about a hundred yards long. On the other side, the refugees were massed in one large herd, clamouring and struggling to get to the edge of the river. The only means of crossing was a single small raft, directed from one bank to the other by means of a rattan cane rope. Of more than 1,000 refugees congregated on the bank, some had waited four days in the hope of crossing the river. They had had little or no food, and there was no vestige of any kind of protection against the pouring rain. The I.T.A. Liaison Officers reached the far bank and issued out the only available rations, which were three bags of rice and half a bag of dhal. Priority was given to the most hunger stricken, who for the most part were women and children. It was

so damp that it was almost impossible to light fires, and as much as ten rupees was bid for two pieces of dry stick. The offer was turned down. Eventually a willing Punjabi succeeded with the Liaison Officer in making a fire, and in four and a half hours the first kettle of warm tea was ready for distribution.

These and dozens of other similar incidents, were typical of the first days of the evacuation by the Ledo route, and I have quoted them in order that the reader may glimpse the desperate nature of the enterprise to which the Indian Tea Association had set its hand.

DIAGRAMMATIC ROUTE MAP—MARGHERITA TO TAGAPGA



	CAMP	CAMP	MILES	TOTAL
1	LEKHAPANI	TIPONG	3	3
2	TIPONG	N TIRAP	4½	7½
3	N TIRAP	KUMLAO	6	13½
4	KUMLAO	BUFFALO	6	19½
5	BUFFALO	NAMCHICK	4	23½
6	NAMCHICK	NAMGOI	8½	32
7	NAMGOI	NAMPONG	3	35
8	NAMPONG	SHAMLUNG	9½	44½
9	SHAMLUNG	NAWNGYANG HKA	6	50½
10	NAWNGYANG HKA	TAGUNG HKA	9	59½
11	TAGUNG HKA	NGALANG GA	8	67½
12	NGALANG GA	NAMLIP	10	77½

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY DAYS ON THE LEDO ROAD

I WILL have more to say about the refugees and the progress of evacuation by the Pangsau route; but at this point I would like to give the reader a more detailed picture of the actual nature of the I.T.A. relief organisation on the road itself—familiarly known as the Jeep Road. Reference to the diagrammatic route map will show the existence of a track running from Simon, via Namgoi Mukh and Yangman, to Nampong. This enabled supplies which had previously been stored on another road project, to be moved down to Nampong, distributed to other camps and the Abor porters so released to be employed on duties forward of Nampong. Thus the Simon-Nampong track played an important role in the general scheme of things and was neither a dead-end nor a diversion, as a first glance at the map might suggest. The track was cut through virgin jungle and was completed by May 21st, evidence that the Abors worked with a will under the cheerful direction of the Assistant Political Officer in charge of the project. The system of transport from Simon to Nawngyang was as follows :—

Simon to Namgoi Mukh	..	boat
Namgoi Mukh to Yangman	..	elephant
Yangman to Nampong	..	Abors
Nampong to Pahari	..	Abors, P.P.C. and Nagas
Pahari to Shamlung	..	Abors and Pnars
Shamlung to Nawngyang	..	Abors and Pnars

By May 25th, 150 loads per day were coming through from Simon to Nampong, and 100 loads per day were being carried forward to Shamlung and Nawngyang. This relieved a critical situation at Tagung Hka, where by May 23rd supplies had fallen to a point where it was impossible to feed even the camp staff. Two days later they were able to issue to evacuees small supplies of cooked food and by May 27th the menu consisted of hot tea, vegetable stew, meat, biscuits and Bovril and milk for the women and children and the sick. By May 30th full rations, for both Europeans and Indians, were being issued at Nawngyang. Porterage, however, remained a constant preoccupation on the section between Nawngyang and Tagung Hka, and a four mile meeting convoy was the utmost the porters could manage in a day. For six days the Abors also maintained a meeting convoy

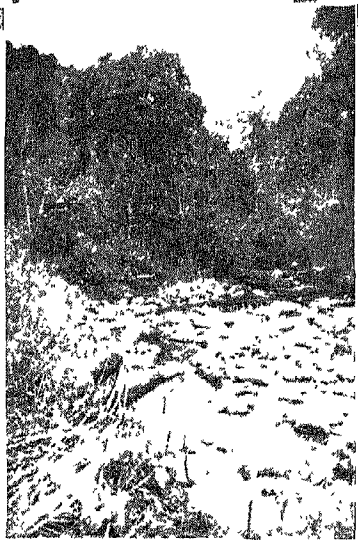
between Tagung Hka and Ngalang Hka over a very difficult road. Signals to air for food to be dropped by plane at Tagung Hka remained unanswered, and it later transpired from air intelligence reports that it was impossible to drop at this place, owing to its low lying situation. By the third week in May irregular air droppings had begun to take place at Shamlung, Ngalang Ga and Tagap Ga, as well as Shinbiwyang, which to some extent relieved the supply position on the far side of the Pangsau. Pilots of the R.A.F. who undertook this task had to fly in unarmed planes in close proximity to the enemy and over mountainous country, descending to within a few hundred feet to drop their loads. Brigadier Whitworth* has explained that the number of aircraft at his disposal for this purpose was seldom more than two a day, more often one and sometimes none. The monsoon created very unfavourable weather conditions, and there were many days on which thick cloud prevented any dropping at all. Parachutes and food containers were in exceedingly short supply. Half a sack was filled with rice or flour, into which was also put tins of fruit and bully beef and packets of tea, sugar and salt. Whenever possible, dried fruit was included, and it had the great advantage that it could be eaten raw. The mouth of the sack was then turned down and sewed to the bottom and sewn up in the same way. This package was then placed in a third sack, the mouth of which was not turned down, but merely sewn up. Brigadier Whitworth explains that the principle was to allow the two inner and tightly packed sacks to burst on impact with the ground, while the loose outer sack held in the contents. If possible, the sacks were dropped from about three hundred feet, and if they landed on soft ground, as was generally the case, the results were quite satisfactory. But the aiming had to be exceedingly careful, and food dropped fifty yards away from a clearing was generally lost for ever in the thick jungle. Technique improved with time, and the percentage of pick-up rose steadily to average over 70 per cent. Cotton steamers were later attached to the sacks and were of great assistance in locating those that fell into the jungle, whilst ultimately packing so improved that disinfectants and other liquids, bottled in sections of green bamboo, were safely dropped along with other stores. Several deaths were caused by packages falling on evacuees, one man actually trying to catch a falling sack as though he were fielding a football. He was not killed outright, but was in hospital for some weeks. A sign of declining morale was the looting of air dropped rations, which was carried on by evacuees with callous disregard for those following behind. At one place a gang of

* Ibid.

There was always rain and mud and soaking jungle, for refugees staggering from camp to camp

Rangpang Naga Chief of Namgoi

Yogh Rangpang Chief His son was in charge of Naga porters



Namchul River in the cold weather

Snow on the Pathoi 9,712 ft Rangpang Nagas and Assam Rifle ↓

Sikhs had started to collect the rations into a hut and were selling them at exhorbitant prices to other refugees, but vigorous action soon put an end to this and any other unsocial activities that developed as time went on. In connection with the dropping of food by air, one important fact was discovered too late This was that in the vicinity of the evacuation route the supply of wood, which would burn, was very limited, and it would have been better to drop more things like biscuits and less uncooked rice and flour.

* * * *

By the last week in May, wireless communication had been established between Nampong and Ledo, although it was only carried on with difficulty owing to lack of full equipment. The wireless equipment was brought up by Captain A. Ramsay Tainsh, a young regular Army officer then attached to the Supply Department, who on arrival volunteered for any kind of work that he might be assigned. His energetic action quickly reduced looting, which at that time threatened to become prevalent, and at Nampong and forward over the Pass he did splendid, and not a little dangerous, work by disarming straggling and detached military units as far out as Ngalang Ga. His methods were both salutary and decisive, and he quickly became one of the most purposeful officers on the road, where he made a special study of those who were reluctant to give up their arms or who employed looting or deceit to obtain an extra share of rations. He is said to have been responsible for the bright idea which prevented evacuees from obtaining a double share of rations at a time when as many as 1,000 a day were passing through the various camps. A large dab of gentian violet was put on the ear or wrist of each man as he passed through the ration queue. Tainsh also did some outstanding rescue work, and his tireless energy and unconventional methods strongly commended themselves to planter Liason Officers, who were sometimes a little impatient at the official formalities which obtruded themselves as one drew nearer headquarters.

On May 20th, the first gangs of specially picked volunteer tea garden labour arrived from Doom-Dooma. Three hundred head loads were going forward daily from Kumlao by this date, and although there were 400 sick Garos, the remainder, under the encouragement of their Magistrate, had begun to enter into the spirit of rescue work. On the following day there was a temporary check at Nampong when the bridge was swept away by a high flood. Trees were felled across the river, but failed to hold, and ultimately an Assam Rifles detachment succeeded in making

a cane bridge which proved effective. This tubular bridge was later repaired and rebuilt by the Abors, who are expert at this kind of work. Long strands of cane, joined by knots where necessary, are firmly attached to trees on either bank. At intervals of every yard or so hoops of cane are then tied to keep the transverse strands in hollow tubular shape A flooring of split bamboo is laid along the full length, and one man at a time can pass along the tube like a cylindrical cage. With careful use, these bridges may last for years. A longer bridge of similar manufacture was also built by the Abors over Nawngyang Hka. By the end of the month medical units had been pushed forward as far as Tagung Hka, and some medical stores were also sent on to Namlip. It was never possible, however, to provision Namlip which was abandoned on June 3rd, and Tagung Hka remained for all practical purposes the most forward camp in which full medical attention could be given.

Transport constituted an ever present problem, and from quite early on daily loads and distances had to be reduced, owing to the never ending mud and rain. The special force of tea garden labour and the Abors repeatedly saved the situation. Apart from ordinary portering, they were of great assistance in small rescue parties, and for camp maintenance. Not so long ago a correspondent to a newspaper in the United Kingdom described the Abors as being sulky, and not so likeable as many of the other hill tribes of Assam. This description hardly does them justice, for when properly managed they were always ready for the hardest work, and more than once revealed a pronounced sense of homour. Generally speaking, their health was good, except for a run of seven or eight deaths at Tirap, which was never fully explained but which were probably due to food or water poisoning. It is tempting, but somewhat misleading, to compare the work of the tea garden labourers with that of the Garos, Pnars and Khasis who were recruited to the Porter Corps —a comparison which some people would consider revealed the latter in an unfavourable light. Without in any way disparaging their splendid work in all circumstances, it has to be remembered that the tea garden labour was recruited at special rates and for very short periods. They worked under selected planters, whom in many cases they knew personally; they were well found in stores and medical necessities from the beginning; they ate the dietary to which they had been accustomed, and they were prepared for the difficult conditions under which they had to work. The Garos, Pnars and Khasis were not integrated in the same way as the tea garden labour, and had fewer common ties. They were due to work for a longer period, frequently under officers

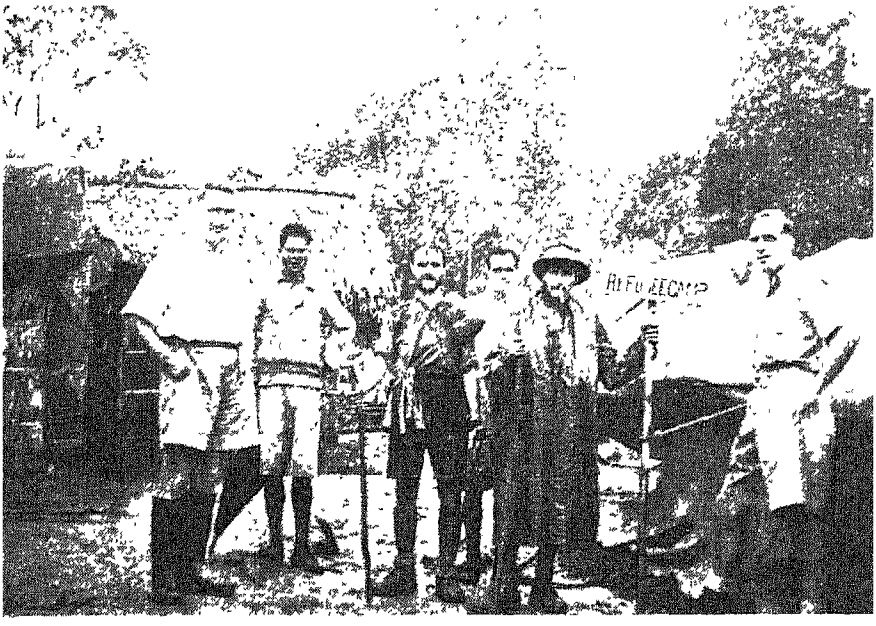
who were unknown to them and had little control over them. The Khasis arrived with a Pnar commander, and the Pnars with a Khasi commander But parties were lacking in much of the equipment originally promised to them, though as far as possible this was made good at the last minute from Indian Tea Association stores, but they lacked such articles as fish and milk, which were staple items of their frugal diet It is open to question whether the physique of the Pnars was equal to the task which they were set. I have already quoted one opinion on this point—an opinion which was fully endorsed by the Principal Medical Officer of the Indian Tea Association. They were not prepared to help themselves by maintaining good sanitation in their own quarters, and cases of malingering were established (binding bandages over perfectly healthy feet was a not uncommon device), but the death-rate, amongst Pnars and Khasis in particular, stands as mute tribute to their willingness and sacrifice. Eleven Abors, 59 Khasis, 52 Pnars, 63 Garos, 2 Porter Corps personnel and 13 tea garden labourers died on the road in the service of their fellow-men. The Albert Medal was awarded to an Abor for an outstanding act of endurance and devotion to duty in rescuing two benighted refugees, whom he carried for many miles in turn upon his back, alternately leaving one and going back for the other.

Various methods of controlling the Porter Corps were tried, and at one time control was handed over to the I.T.A. The Liason Officer was well liked and successful. He travelled the route continuously, but he could not be everywhere at once and eventually his health broke under the strain. If it was difficult to persuade porters to bury their own dead, it was well-nigh impossible to get them to touch the bodies of evacuees, but sometimes they would take a hand. An entry in a diary which has come my way reads as follows: "the Abors helped me burn a few corpses. They did not like doing it, but when they saw H— and I piling wood and grass over the wretched remains they came along and helped. As they threw on wood and logs the Arbors jumped in the air whooping to keep the devils from getting them. H—and I joined in the whooping, and we soon had everyone whooping and burning. In our endeavours to cleanse the hill we nearly burnt up an old man who at first sight appeared dead." For the most part, however, when bodies fell by the roadside they lay there, but corpses had to be removed from the camps—a task which finally fell to Medical and Liaison Officers. Shamlung Ga camp, which was a sinister place, presented this particular problem in an acute form. After the long climb up the Pangsau Pass many evacuees could get no further, and they died in or

near the camp. As there was no convenient river or precipice for the disposal of bodies, it was sometimes necessary to pull down the shelters where they lay, and fire the whole with the aid of kerosene.

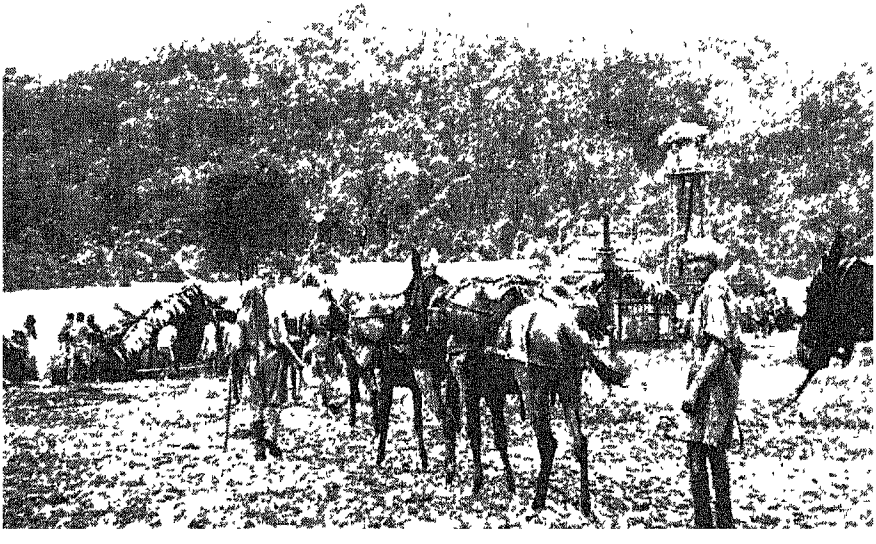
* * * *

What of the Liaison Officers themselves? For the most part they were living under exceedingly uncomfortable and depressing conditions. The Liaison Officer's basha, or hut, at Shamlung for instance, resembled a chicken roost more than anything else. It was erected on stilts, entered by a ladder and the interior measured approximately nine feet by five feet. The space underneath the hut was a favourite refuge for exhausted evacuees and bullocks. The stench was continuous and nauseating, a condition which applied to many of the Liaison Officers' quarters All camp staffs experienced great difficulty in obtaining fresh food, particularly vegetables and fruit, and for most of them clothes and footwear remained permanently sodden by the rain. No mosquito net was proof against the bites of the small dim-dam flies, which could be guaranteed to keep even exhausted men awake through the night. It is interesting to note a certain similarity of performance as between evacuees and Liaison Officers. In both cases the older men, who might have been expected to crack up first, were able to carry on at least as long as, and sometimes longer than, the younger and fitter men. This must be ascribed to greater experience of how to husband one's physical resources by proper precautions. The younger Liaison Officers ultimately learnt that it did not pay to attempt enormous stretches for days on end without dry clothes and proper food, and without taking prophylactic medicine. In rescuer, or rescued, the personal factor counted for a very great deal. For instance, amongst the refugees the young died first and most, but it was astonishing how a new born baby could survive, sometimes in the most dreadful conditions. Young Anglo-Indians, and Anglo-Burmans, thought they could do the trek easily, and went hard at it from the outset. When attacked with sickness they had little or no reserves of strength, and quickly fell victim to disease. The middle-aged observed a rather slower tempo, and appeared to have more in hand when called upon to make a special effort. Most observers agree that, "down to earth," women showed more common-sense than men. They were tougher, more resourceful, more collected and calmer, and as the trek developed women appeared to acquire an increasingly domineering character. Speaking of the relations of the sexes on this long journey in which both husbands and wives died and



Two early British refugees at North Tirap photographed with Macara, Fairfield and J. H. Alexander.

BELOW: *The Mule Company leaving North Tirap for Kumlao*



families and parties got separated, an experienced camp officer told me there might have been some irregularities, but as the journey wore on and hardship increased sex, like one's station in life, counted for less and less He did not believe a single story of rape so far as his section of the route was concerned, but said that no one had the slightest compunction in robbing a corpse, or a dying man, of such a thing as a blanket. Real systematic robbery of the person was regarded as permissible after death. Such was the queer, but not entirely illogical morality of the road, along which the Liaison Officers and their colleagues kept the stream of refugees constantly moving As might have been expected, the first days of the evacuation produced the usual crop of fantastic rumours Many refugees thought they were closely followed by Jap columns; others believed that the Japanese were advancing so fast on the Manipur Road that they were being machine-gunned by their own planes. One party enquired if it was true that Gibraltar had been taken. Indian refugees had been told in Burma that they would be fed *en route* by a Congress organisation. They frequently asked where this was, and no one could tell them. Rumour spread more quickly than the truth. It was almost useless to question new arrivals as to anything which had happened on the road, for they were mostly too overwrought to give accurate information, although only too willing to relate their personal experiences.

To keep the refugees regularly moving forward was one of the most difficult tasks a Liaison Officer was called upon to perform. As far as possible, movements in and out of camps were regulated in accordance with the steadily diminishing strength of the refugees, who would be sent off early enough in the morning to make sure that, with reasonable luck, they would reach another halting place by nightfall. Once a refugee had arrived in camp and had eaten food and thus acquired a more comfortable feeling under the belt, he or she almost always asked to be allowed to stay and rest for a day or two. They would promise to move on the following morning, but when the time came they felt less inclined to make a start. They would then hang around and try to get more food, until it was refused. Finally, the more obstinate cases would have to be driven out of the camps and made to continue the journey to safety. In the later stages of the evacuation physical and psychological collapse between camps became common, and Liaison Officers had often to act sternly and with brute force. There can be little doubt that hundreds of lives were saved by unsympathetic but highly realistic measures. From many accounts that have reached me, here is a description of a typical incident:

"Not far from the camp we met a refugee sitting by the side of the road trying to light a fire He was in a dying condition, and had the large blue and green bottles buzzing round him. We gave him a box of matches, lit a fire for him and then hurried on. Further on we found a family who had spent a night huddled under a sheet. Our shouts and yells did not cause them to stir, so I pulled off the sheet and found a father, mother and son all crouched under it with their heads resting on their knees. They refused to move, and tried to pull the sheet back. The father said they were tired of the struggle of trying to reach India, and were going to stay there and die I had some tea in my flask, so I gave them each a drink and some biscuits We told them to get moving, but they had not the mental energy to make the attempt. I pulled the child on to his feet, but he just sat down again—he was cold and stiff We then pulled up the father and mother, but the same thing happened It was easier to die than reach India. However, we were determined that all who could be saved, should reach the base. We shouted and yelled at them, and then started to beat them lightly on the legs, arms and bodies This stimulated them sufficiently to make them get up. A little more encouragement, and they were shuffling down the road. We made them as angry as we could, and then handed them another biscuit each and threatened a really good hiding if we had to come out and search for them in the evening. All the way along the route we found groups of people who wanted to remain behind and die. However, we made things so hot for them that they found it more pleasant to keep ahead of us."

An officer who had a protracted stay in one of the forward camps has told me that the only way to deal with a laggard refugee was to steel one's heart to all entreaties, unless of course he was too ill to move unaided. Exhortation usually fell into three stages. The first was a friendly exposition, in cold logic, of the dangers of sitting or lying about, until the exhaustion which is the inevitable prelude to death numbed the brain and paralysed the reason. If such a friendly talk failed of its purpose, the second and more admonitory stage consisted of stinging the refugee into mental activity by the use of rude and abusive language of a personal character. This often succeeded, but if it did not, a few sharp cuts (friendly rather than punitive in intention) produced the desired effect. There can be no doubt that many hundreds of lives were saved by thus harrying the refugees, before the malaise of the road got at the brain and still further reduced the will power of an already emaciated body. To many a refugee some Liaison Officers must have seemed hard carted, but bitter experience showed it was the only way. Towards the end, when the I.T.A. camps had been withdrawn and refugees insisted on leaving Shinbiwyang, in spite of orders and the fact that they were being fed from the air, the toll of death from sheer exhaustion mounted terribly. The road became littered with pitiful little shelters built by those who now had neither the strength nor the incentive or extraneous aid to go further. Under their leaves and bamboo shoots they lay down to die at the side of the path along which Liaison Officers had alternately goaded and encouraged their more fortunate brethren.

CHAPTER VII.

JUNE AND THE GOLDEN STAIRS

BY June 1st the organisation was fully mounted, and evacuation was in full swing. From Tipong right up to the Pangsau Pass Liaison Officers had started to create a reserve of rations in each camp, and the ever thoughtful "Q" department had begun to send forward such extra comforts as cigarettes and the like. During the first week of June 10,000 evacuees passed through the various camps, the peak figure being 1,355 in one day at Nampong. Towards the end of the week the numbers dropped, the lowest figure being 145 on June 5th and it began to look as though the end was being reached Then, as was to happen periodically, numbers suddenly rose again and the next three days saw 780, 811 and 530 men, women and children checked in and out by camp staffs, who got little opportunity for rest amongst the multifarious duties connected with issuing rations, providing medical attention and maintaining some semblance of order amongst the refugees. The I.T.A.'s Road Commander, whose headquarters were at Nampong, was very fully engaged in general supervision of the route, and lack of communications involved him in a good deal of journeying backwards and forwards. There was also now a fully equipped hospital at Nampong, the doctor in charge being a tower of strength, not only in the camp but on the road itself. On at least one occasion he was seen carrying on his back a serious case of dysentery, which the porters had refused to transport into camp. *Esprit de corps* was high, and the Road Commander at Nampong founded what became known as the Jeep Club, of which the insignia of membership consisted of two strands of red split cane, worn below the knee after the Naga fashion. The original qualification for membership consisted of having worked on the Jeep Road, but it was later raised to include only those who had crossed the Pangsau. One officer who considered he had been employed too long at the base made a trip to Nglang Ga with a stretcher party in the last stages of the evacuation in order to qualify for membership of the Club. He went at his own risk and with only five porters As he approached the Pass, the stench of rotting corpses forced him to stuff his nostrils with cotton wool, and for forty-eight hours he could keep no food down. Yet he returned and brought with him sixty-seven

refugees, who would almost certainly have perished but for his effort. There is no doubt that, in this case, the right of wearing the coveted badge of membership of the Jeep Club was well and truly earned.

At the base camp itself reception arrangements were on a relatively lavish scale, and rail cars belonging to the Dibru-Sadiya Railway met the evacuees as they arrived at Tipong to take them to Lekhapani. Says a contemporary account which has been sent to me: "stout Cortez upon his peak at Darien can scarcely have viewed the Pacific with greater joy than the evacuees welcomed the first sight of the trolley line from the top of the last slope leading down to Tipong Camp." I will not attempt to improve on the description. Here, at Lekhapani, was the immediate reception station known as the Tea-pot Pub where, on arrival, evacuees were given hot tea, biscuits, cheese and jam. If they arrived in time they went straight by train to Margherita; if not they halted overnight and travelled by the first train in the morning. Each day two special trains were run for this purpose. The first arrivals at Lekhapani were merely exhausted, but the average condition of the refugees showed a steady debilitation as time went on. By the end of June, signs of starvation and malnutrition were very marked, for it must be remembered that many of the later arrivals had travelled for weeks—even months—before they reached the I.T.A. camps, having started from those areas in Lower and eastern Burma which were first attacked by the Japanese. Furthermore, the early parties on this route tended to be better found and better organised than those which came later. Typical of the former was a party from Steel Brothers, a well known British firm in the East. During the latter stages of the Burma campaign, Steel Brothers' men had been employed in the purchase and distribution of rice on behalf of both government and the military authorities. Some of them had been given acting Army ranks, and after the bombing and evacuation of Rangoon they had been in Mandalay when it was bombed and destroyed by fire at the beginning of April. They stayed there under very bad conditions until the end of the month, and then came in for a further severe bombing at Shwebo on April 30th, when two of their number were wounded. As one military reverse after another overtook the Burma Government's plans for evacuation, Steel's party became part of that large, floating, concourse which was surging north-west towards the Indian frontier. Working up-country *via* Katha and Bhamo (where they missed the Japanese by a day) they reached Myitkyina, and with the rest decided to make for India *via* the Hukawng Valley. From Mogaung they began a trek

which turned out to be 330 miles in length. At Htinhawk they collected twenty-two of the Company's forest elephants, and proceeding *via* Maingkwan and Shinbiwyang set out for the Pangsau Pass. By this time their party had increased to fourteen in number, and as they approached Shinbiwyang corpses were already beginning to litter the track. Fortunately there was a fairly large supply of rice available on this stretch of the journey, as stocks had been laid down for Chinese coolies who were to work on a road on the Burma side of the Pangsau. Only eleven mahouts with their elephants could be persuaded to continue beyond Shinbiwyang, but the party gradually picked up a number of sick women and children, who were placed in the baskets on either side of the elephants. Amongst the passengers so transported was a Punjabi Subedar-Major's wife who gave birth to a child, and a British sergeant of the K.O.Y L.I's who later unfortunately died crossing the Pangsau. No one who was not sick was allowed to ride, and kit was cut down to a minimum. By the end of the journey the elephants were really mobile hospitals, and the only covering this ever enlarging party had for the nights were two small tarpaulins and a small two-man tent. At the dreaded Namyang River, whose terrors I have described earlier in this narrative, the elephants did good work transporting women and children from one bank to another. When Steel's party arrived there the river was in spate and the elephants had to work at a steep angle against the stream, bumping and boring, with the water rushing round them like the sea against a ship's prow. The mahouts shouted to cheer them on, but the press and clamour of the refugees and the fact that, for no apparent reason a number of seapoys decided to let off their rifles intermittently, made the elephants increasingly nervous, and this most useful operation had to be reluctantly abandoned. From Nampong, Steel's party were directed down the supply route to Namgoi, a diversion which was rendered necessary by the heavy damage which the elephants were causing to the track.

* * * *

But not all parties travelled as quickly or were as well provided as Steel's. Generally speaking, Europeans, largely in their middle years, moved at a steady pace, but members of the Anglo-Burman and Anglo-Indian communities were greatly handicapped by large families of varying ages. The average daily speed of a party was chiefly conditioned by the old people, or the very young children within it. As the trek progressed individual parties suffered casualties and tended to disintegrate.

Whilst there might be no major disruption during the course of a day's journey, considerable inconvenience and hardship might none-the-less be caused by those members of a party who were carrying food and the cooking pot getting separated from one another, with the resultant delays in preparing a meal. However scanty meals might be, many advantages attached to taking them regularly on a route on which stomachic and bowel complaints were in epidemic form. On being asked how she managed to keep herself and her children moving on on so little food (they were in a starving condition) one Anglo-Indian woman explained that they had never missed a meal since they had set out from their home. No matter how little food they had, she had apportioned it into regular meals, even if the latter only consisted of a dozen grains of rice. In spite of their emaciated condition, neither she nor her three children had suffered from any kind of stomach trouble on the road. Her husband had died in the early stages of the evacuation, and consciously or otherwise, this widowed head of a family had followed one of the golden rules of dietetics, and thereby saved herself and her off-spring not a little suffering I have already referred to the self-assurance and calm resourcefulness of the women evacuees as the trek developed. But they were not the only ones who disclosed high qualities of leadership. The Road Commander has told me of a case of a fourteen-year-old Anglo-Indian boy, Norman Richardson, who by his single handed courage brought through the remnants of a large family after his parents had died. After carrying him to the last, he had to leave the body of his little baby brother in the mud of the track between Ngalang and Tagung Hka where with loving hands he finally laid him. Many a night after reaching camp he would go back on his tracks for two or three miles to help on his aged grandmother. Near the spot where the Richardson baby was laid there was found, some three months later, the bones of a Gurkha woman who had fallen in the mud and been unable to rise. The skeleton of her little child was still bound fast upon her shoulders. The harrowing stories of parties of families and friends who had to leave members behind to die on the road are legion, and I do not want to dwell upon them unnecessarily. In many cases those who went on could not be blamed, for they themselves were often too weak to help on those who were sick, and it was not reasonable that all should perish. One thinks with horror and a profound pity of the two little English girls who were left in a slender leaf-covered shelter somewhere between Tagup Ga and Namlip. One was dead and the other, racked with high fever, was peering hopelessly into the rain, waiting for the release that was soon to come. Or what

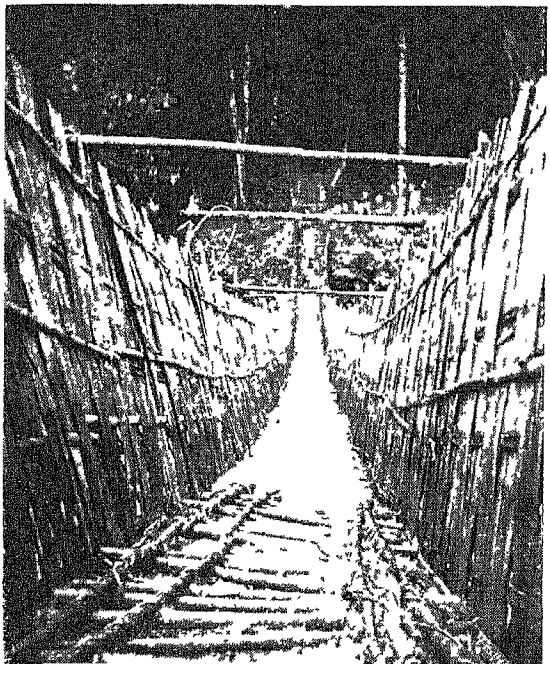
Harrison's quarters near the stream beyond Shamlang.

The I I A Camp at Nampong

A typical refugee halting place in the jungle

North Trap suspension bridge. It had a 200 ft. span

Looking along the suspension bridge from the interior



more pitiable last message can have been penned than that which was scribbled in a wavering hand on the fly-leaf of a charred soldier's pay book and brought in by a Punjabi coolie, who neither knew whence he had brought it, nor how long it had been written, it ran .—

> "Mrs. B. . and her four children, who have been left fatherless, have starved for five days without food and would be much obliged if you could send something. Thanking you.

Although a search was instituted, no trace was ever found of this poor woman, who asked for help but did not complain, and who retained to the bitter and tragic end the polite formulæ which is traditional in the East. Into the strange saga of the road, there are woven both highlights of heroism and stories of moral depravity. I have recounted one or two of the former. There are others, but I cannot hope to do justice to hundreds of unrecorded acts of courage and self-sacrifice. A figure, well known to the planters of Assam who had but recently been called to military service, died at Shinbiwyang from pneumonia, contracted as a direct result of his gallant action in staying behind with some Indian other ranks of his unit to help evacuees over a fast flowing river. He spent several days almost entirely in the water, and refugees were unanimous in asserting that he had saved hundreds of lives at the price of his own. At another river, near the 120th mile from Mogaung, an Anglo-Indian telegraphist from Maymyo, Frank Sinclair Gomes by name, stood on bank waiting his turn to cross. An over-crowded canoe capsized, and Gomes swam out three times and rescued a Gurkha woman and a Madrasi woman and her child.

Many other acts of gallantry and devotion to duty, either to one's fellows or friends or family, must go unhonoured and unsung In contrast there were isolated acts of selfishness, particularly in the first phase of the evacuation, which observers found it difficult to excuse. It has to be recorded that for the most part they occurred amongst refugees of rank and ample means, who might have been expected to show a better example. Inevitably, there was also a certain amount of minor crime, as well as a few really serious offences against the law. Not all of them could be detected or punished, and justice had to be of a summary character. The fact is, of course, that right along the road, and for as long as the evacuation continued, the best side of human nature was always uppermost. In a report written at the end of July, the Deputy Commissioner of Myitkyina, who made his way out of Burma *via* Shinbiwyang and the Ledo route, declared: "When all the conditions are considered one cannot but express the greatest admiration for the grit and determination to get

through of the masses of Indians and Anglo-Indians, many of whom displayed extraordinary courage and self-sacrifice in helping their families and others on their way" I am not, I hope, doing an injustice to military and other official personnel, if I give credit to the planter Liaison Officers for much of the maintenance of the high level of morale amongst the refugees. A senior Burma official in a report listing the most noticeable features of the journey names the "smell of death and dung, notably from Mainghkwan to the Namyung," but notes "its almost equally marked absence in the later stages of the journey after the I.T.A. organisation had been met." This must surely have been a factor in sustaining the bodily and mental fitness of the refugees. Another Burma officer who himself served on the road for a period, and whose local knowledge was of great help to those working from the Assam side, concluded his report with the following remarks: "to my mind the tea planters of Assam and Bengal, especially those who worked on the road, and the doctors from the tea gardens who were attached to the road camps, are chiefly responsible for the success of this evacuation. No praise can be too high for the work they have done. I would not have believed that a body of men could have worked in such a wholehearted fashion, if I had not seen it for myself. They were cheerful with never a grumble, not wanting to go back to base if they felt seedy; in fact the tendency was to get forward if they could, and stick it out until the last evacuee had gone through. In the midst of all the discomforts of this trip this was the one bright part. A lot of it I would rather forget, but it will always give me pleasure to remember that I was associated for a time with such a fine lot of fellows."

This was high praise, indeed.

* * * *

If it was easy at the time to criticise morale and hard to judge it fairly, it will probably help the general reader if I devote the rest of this chapter to a brief description of the road as it existed about the middle of June. Moving out towards the Burma border from the rail head at Tipong, new road earthwork had first formed bad quagmires and then been washed away. The first two miles were fairly steep uphill, but then the track undulated to the Tirap River which was crossed by an excellent suspension bridge of about one hundred and fifty feet span, which had been built by the Assam Regiment in the cold weather of 1941-42. The north Tirap camp (see diagrammatic route map) was established on a good clean site on the river bank, but for

some unexplained reason sickness and mortality amongst the porters was high From North Tirap to Kumlao was a distance of six miles, where the going was always exceedingly heavy. This stretch contained the famous Golden Stairs. Who gave them this name and why, I have not been able to discover, and it is certain they were no Socratic " fair resting-place full of summer sounds and scents." The Golden Stairs, known to every refugee who survived to travel thus far, and to every relief worker and porter on the route, were not on the alignment of the road itself, but provided a short cut. They consisted of roughly 1,000 steep steps cut in the hill-side and strengthened by bamboo uprights and cross pieces. In the rains they collapsed and became a most exhausting quagmire of mud. The alternate and longer route between Tirap and Kumlao, normally used by mules was, apart from the gradient, even heavier going and stretcher cases usually preferred to use the satirically named Golden Stairs. Accommodation at Kumlao camp was somewhat cramped, and the camp had to be laid out up and down the hill-side. There was a steep two mile climb for evacuees coming into Kumlao, but the rest of the six miles between Kumlao and Buffalo were comparatively easy. From Buffalo to Namchick is a distance of four miles on which quite a lot of the Jeep Road had been cut, and at Namchick itself there was a suspension bridge across the river, similar to that at Tirap, but not quite so long. The eight and a half miles from Namchick to Namgoi was generally reckoned the easiest part of the road, and Namgoi itself was regarded as an excellent camp. The three miles which separated Namgoi and Nampong was level but very heavy going, whilst Nampong Camp was considered by the I.T.A. to be one of the most difficult to administer. It was low lying and muddy and hard to keep clean, even with the use of duck boards A mitigating feature of the camp was the well stocked and conducted hospital. Nampong is at an elevation of 900 ft. and provided the taking off place for a stiff climb to Pahari or Porter Camp. Porters carrying stores had the long pull up from Nampong to Pahari, but refugees coming the other way enjoyed the benefit of a downhill spell. Between Pahari and Shamlung lay the Pangsau Pass, and the trail through Nongki village and over the Pass developed into a very stiff climb indeed The first two miles out from Pahari Camp consisted of a particularly heavy and sticky clay, which at times became a glissade, and though downhill for refugees was particularly trying when they were more than usually exhausted. From Nongki village to the Pass, the route was nothing more than a series of boulders with buffalo wallows in between, the gradient being very steep. The Pangsau Pass itself forms no

definite ridge, but is very steep on the Assam side and the road alignment had to run some miles to the west and back again. On the Burma side, the slope was steep but not quite so precipitate as the Assam side. Nawngyang camp was about 2,000 ft. up, the river being slow moving but deep, and on its Burma bank treacherous marshland had to be crossed for nearly a mile. There was a sharp drop down from the Nawngyang to Tagung Hka, which conversely confronted refugees with a killing climb, and deaths and casualties of all kinds were very high on this section It was equally hard on porters and, as the trail was closed in by overhanging jungle, they rarely got a chance to dry out—even during a spell of fine weather. The Tagung Hka refugee camp was located on the Assam side of the river, and a small staff camp was set up on the Burma side. Both were surrounded by foul mud and the Tagung Hka itself, which was approximately 50 ft. wide, was fast flowing and unfordable for animals. However, a stone pile bridge, with bamboo spans, provided one of the best such structures on the route. From Nawngyang Hka to Tagung Hka was approximately nine miles, and it had the reputation of being one of the worst sections on the whole road, Mud was often well above the knees, and it was necessary to climb over boulders and cling to tree roots to avoid slipping down the hill-side. Tagung Hka to Ngalang Ga, a distance of eight miles, furnished another gruelling climb. Small camps were established round the hill-top at Ngalang Ga and they were successfully provisioned by air dropping. The ten miles from Ngalang Ga to Namlip mainly consisted of a very steep slope down, and for the refugees, therefore, it constituted a climb even worse than the one up to the Pangsau Pass. At Namlip there was only a small temporary camp staffed by a doctor, with a considerable supply of medicine and two Liaison Officers. These three officers, who were the first to be met by refugees after leaving Shinbiwyang, were undoubtedly instrumental in saving many lives by encouraging refugees to press on to the camps ahead, and giving assurances of food and shelter on the route. Altogether the Indian Tea Association camps covered 77½ miles of the worst part of the route.

Naturally the condition of the road varied considerably from day to day. It was bad at the beginning of a rainy spell, when it was extremely slippery, but at its worst just when it began to dry. At that time it became so heavy that refugees would often be quite unable to extricate themselves. Up to Nampong the camps could always be kept reasonably ship shape, but thereafter the huts were of very poor quality. From Nampong forward banana leaves were the only roofing obtainable, nor was personnel

available for proper building and camp duties. In the end the forward camps became so foul that even the evacuees would not stay in them, for the previous occupants in their exhausted state thought nothing of relieving themselves in the bashas. Thus the area of filthy and delapidated shelters grew, and as long as between five hundred and a thousand people, requiring food and medical attention, were passing through them every day, it was impossible to do anything to improve them. Wherever possible evacuee accommodation was kept entirely separate from permanent staff quarters in the main camps, as it was clearly important to maintain Liaison Officers, Medical staff, porters and menials in as good health as possible. When the evacuation was under way a good deal was written and said about racial discrimination. So far as I.T.A. camps were concerned there was no discrimination of any kind, beyond what was deemed necessary to meet personal customs associated with the bathroom and the kitchen.

Finally, one of the distinctive and peculiar features of the evacuation route seems to have been the absence of animal life—other than those animals brought to the spot by the refugees or the relief organisation. From one point of view this was an advantage. Refugees finding themselves in difficulties were not preyed upon by wild beasts. On the other hand that process of scavenging, in which the lower animals assist, was absent at a time when the disposal of bodies in an advanced state of decomposition created an insoluble problem from one end of the road to the other. An officer who did a final reconnaissance when the evacuation had virtually come to an end recorded his impressions at the time, and has since sent me a copy of his diary. The following passage seems to me to reproduce something of the poignancy of an occasion that was at once a tragedy and a triumph:

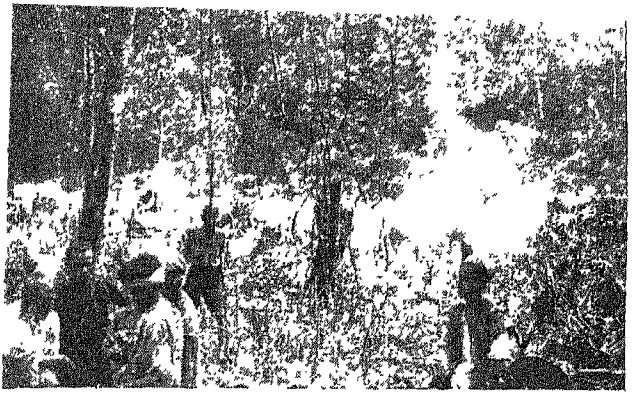
> "It was a beautiful day, and from the top of the hill I could see the great basin of the Nawngyang lake. There were no villages in the valley, but the hill-sides had been extensively jhumed. These jhums* were covered with secondary forest, but they showed up clearly as they were of lighter green. This area looked as if it would have been a perfect game sanctuary teeming with bison, elephant and rhino; but I saw no sign of wild life, not even a marsh bird.
>
> "To the south in the Tagun Valley, several large grassy jhums occupied the top of the ridges. In each jhum was a small hut built high off the ground, where the Nagas lived

*A jhum is a clearing in the jungle made by Nagas for temporary cultivation.

while tending their crops Here too there was no sign of life. At every footstep I was reminded of death and destruction. The struggle for existence seemed too hard for man and beast. I had not seen a single bird since I left Ledo Only butterflies seemed to be happy in the monsoon, and they flitted round in their thousands to cheer and brighten every corpse.

"The Tagun Hill had been a favourite resting-place for refugees, and the clearing was littered with tumble-down huts, where often whole families stayed and died together. I found the bodies of a mother and child locked in each others arms. In another hut were the remains of another mother who had died in childbirth, with the child only half born In this one little jhum more than fifty people had died. Sometimes pious Christians placed little wooden crucifixes in the ground before they died. Others had figures of the Virgin Mary still clutched in their skeleton hands. A soldier had expired wearing his side cap, all his cotton clothing had rotted away, but the woollen cap sat smartly on his grinning skull. Already the ever destroying jungle had overgrown some of the older huts, covering up the skeletons and reducing them to dust and mould."

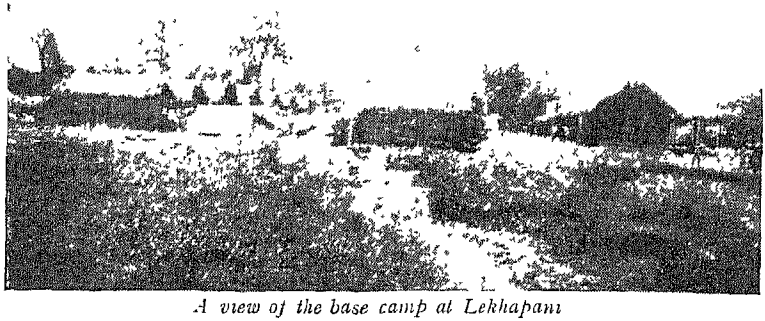
Three refugee scenes.



A regular halting place near Shamlung

A group of refugees by the roadside

A typical Naga built hut in which refugees lived and sometimes died.



A view of the base camp at Lekhapani

A conference of I I A relief workers at Nampong

The Liaison Officers quarters at Namchick

CHAPTER VIII.

NAGA SORES AND DYSENTERY.

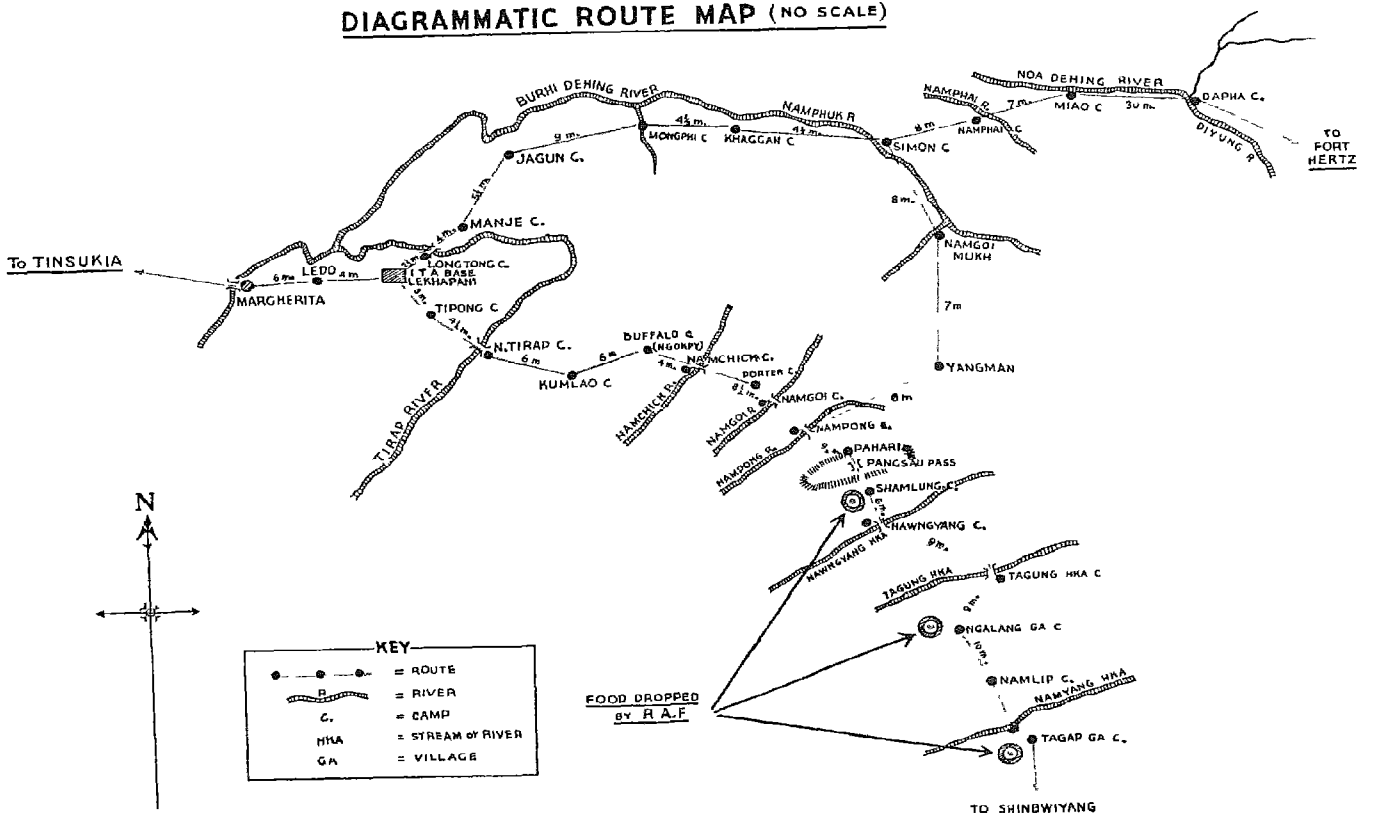
IT is obvious that more than twenty thousand refugees, the number which passed over the Ledo route, could not be brought to safety without medical arrangements on a fairly elaborate scale. Not merely on the Ledo route, but on the others as well, the incidence of sickness was relatively low in the beginning, but rose rapidly as the monsoon developed. The Indian Refugee Organisation, to whom the medical personnel of the Indian Tea organisation voluntarily subordinated themselves, and under those general guidance they worked, had to make up its mind right from the beginning on one or two important matters of general policy. To what extent should sickness cases be detained and treated *en route*? This was a question that required an answer, whether one posed it in connection with the evacuation by the Chindwin Valley or the Hukawng Valley. And as a corollary, at what level should medical and hospital treatment be provided in the many camps which the relief operations were bringing into being? A number of factors were involved, and it was quickly realised that the matter could not be settled by rule of thumb. At the beginning of the evacuation refugees displayed a well marked inclination to press on towards safety, taking a fairly lighthearted view of their ailments. Then again the creation of a hospital organisation, alongside the camps, which would have enabled the sick to make a complete recovery before continuing their onward journey was beyond the medical and transportation resources available. The longer refugees were detained, the greater the total amount of stores of all kinds that had to be transported. It was quite impossible to provide thousands of beds *en route*, with the complement of doctors, dispensers, etc., that would have been necessary for their supervision. In the result, therefore, medical treatment as a whole was directed to "patching up" the sick refugee to the extent of making it possible for him to continue his journey to the base camp, where he could have further treatment, or go on to one of the big established hospitals in an Indian city. "Patching up" was reinforced by prophylaxis against preventive disease and, as far as possible, the enforcement of those rules of hygiene which would assist in keeping infection at a minimum. Taken together, these three

lines of action combined to form a medical policy which is admitted on all hands to constitute one of the most satisfactory chapters of the chequered story of the evacuation. On all routes some 220,000 refugees were brought safely into India, and the known deaths on the road numbered 4,268 though the actual death rate will never be known. It is improbable that, at the outside, it was more than twice this figure and, of course, there was sickness (directly attributable to their experiences *en route*), and a continuing death roll amongst the refugees, for a long time after they had left the hands of the relief organisation and found sanctuary with friends and relations. But, considering the privations and the physical strain to which they were subjected, it is a tremendous tribute to the medical services that the death roll in and between camps was not more than two to four per cent. of the whole. For this not a little of the credit goes to the medical staff, tea garden doctors, compounders and others, whom the Indian Tea Association brought into the service of the relief organisation.

There was something eminently sensible and refreshing about the decision to pool all medical resources; and from the outset personnel, equipment and medical stores—whether they were civil or military or belonging to the Central Government or to a Provincial Government—came under unified direction and control. The first big victory on the Ledo Road was scored over cholera, preventive treatment keeping the disease from rising to epidemic proportions, in spite of the existence of conditions that were a permanent encouragement to the deadly germ. For scores of miles, many of the routes traversed some of the most deadly malarious areas in the world, where cerebral malaria and blackwater fever abounded. But dysentery was the most prevalent, and the most serious disease with which both refugee and relief worker had to contend. In the closing weeks of the evacuation, practically every refugee was not only suffering from dysentery but also had an additional disease super-imposed upon it.

On the Shinbiwyang-Ledo road itself, in addition to the Principal Medical Officer of the Indian Tea Association, there were five fully qualified European doctors, and one Indian doctor, distributed between Lekhapani and Tagung Hka at intervals of approximately fifteen miles. In every camp, at intervals of roughly seven miles, there was a small camp hospital, staffed with one assistant medical officer, one compounder and one anti-malarial babu, with whatever might be necessary in the way of dressers and menial staff. As a rule evacuees were given a medical inspection on the Burma side of each camp, so as to locate infection before it had an opportunity to be carried into the main

DIAGRAMMATIC ROUTE MAP (NO SCALE)



camps. Serious cases of illness or exhaustion were treated in camp hospitals, and cases unable to walk were handed over to stretcher parties. Between camps, temporary sheds and benches were erected on the road side, and minor complaints were dealt with there. In the forward camps thousands of evacuees were innoculated against cholera, and the consequence was that the revages of this disease never seriously appeared. Every one suffered from a form of colitis which, unless checked, quickly turned to dysentery. By July malaria was on the increase, and at this period the Indian medical staff were grossly overworked. Government were asked to supply 30 Assistant Medical Officers and 30 compounders to meet the emergency, but the net effective response was one Assistant Medical Officer. Without knowing the full facts it would be unfair to comment on this, but the immediate practical result was illness amongst the Indian medical staff on the road, with no possibility of replacing casualties in this essential service.

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Starvation, malnutrition and exhaustion were the bases of all major illnesses on the road. One lay observer has written to me: "Medical technique had to be altered to fit the situation. There was nothing but rain and mud, day after day and night after night. The people who reached us were the toughest, not brawny youths from eighteen to twenty-five, but children, young women, middle-aged people and old folk. It was not a matter of brawn, but of determination and common sense. Those who could keep their matches dry and could light a fire, those who washed their stinking bodies and their dirty socks, those who started the day's march at sunrise and walked unhurriedly until midday and then camped—those were the people who survived." He adds that, in the early days of the evacuation, the refugees demanded cigarettes as their nerves were shattered by lack of sleep and forced marches through deep mud. Physical disabilities were confined to bad feet, and they were generally able to continue after being given hot tea and a little food. By the end of May, however, camp officers were beginning to find young men in an extreme state of exhaustion. They had often been walking for five or six days without any food. With the best intentions in the world, they were given a little rum mixed with tea and milk, but the result was almost always deleterious, and in some instances fatal. The word went quickly up and down the road that alcohol is poison in cases of extreme exhaustion.

At first in the advanced camps food was very scarce, and refugees were not given very much to eat which, in the condition

of their health, was not a bad thing. Later, when supplies were more plentiful, they were given as much as they asked for, until it was realised that generous portions of food could also be fatal when given to a starving man. The amount of food given in the camps was quickly regulated to more suitable quantities, and a balance was struck between a refugee's desire and what was good for him. But a good deal of sickness continued to be contracted between camps. By June the people coming over the Ledo route had been on the trek longer, and had run out of matches, and were often eating uncooked rice and raw jungle plants. Sores on damaged feet were turning septic, and hundreds of cases were treated by the doctors and dressers with gentian violent, the value of which was probably more psychological than medicinal. It was the outward and visible sign that there was help on the road, and that it was worthwhile making a supreme effort to reach India.

By early June there were many signs of vitamin deficiencies among the refugees. This was not unexpected as, on the Burma section of the journey, they had been existing almost entirely on rice, which was often dirty and musty. In washing it before cooking, they actually washed away its vitamin content; and having consumed a large meal they were not infrequently physically more exhausted than before eating. Lack of sleep was also a debilitating factor. By the time they arrived at the first I.T.A. camp, some people had not slept soundly for more than a month. The usual symptoms of a lack of vitamin deficiency were a red, sore tongue, a burning sensation in the hands, pins and needles in the legs and a vague but constant pain in the back of the head. These symptoms were generally accompanied by a loss of morale, particularly as it affected what we may call "common decency." If refugees so affected halted for much more than a day their legs and ankles often became swollen and pitted, and the most effective treatment was to give nicotine acid and thiamine chloride along with yeast and marmite.

The ugly Naga sores made their first appearance early in June, the first cases being men, mostly men who were trekking alone. The Naga sore is an ulcer, peculiar to the part of the world from which it derives its name, which attacked those refugees who were badly undernourished, and whose food had been lacking in vitamins and calcium. A man trekking alone was apt to pay less attention to matters of food than a man travelling in a party, particularly a party containing a woman who could cook. The women got to know a thing or two about jungle lore, and I have been told that they would very often cook bracken ferntops and banana stems with their rice, to preserve some of

the natural goodness of the latter. The Naga sore, or ulcer, starts as a small blister, usually on the leg or foot, in a place where there is not much flesh It develops rapidly for four or five days and then stops. By this time it may be five inches in diameter and half an inch deep, destroying all the upper layers of skin and often the tendons and muscles as well. Though it often has a clean appearance when washed, the under part frequently stinks to high heaven, from the pus which rapidly accumulates in the cavity. The possession of a Naga sore or sores was a very considerable handicap to a refugee who was making his way on foot, and every camp doctor tried to find a cure, but without final success. One and all came to the conclusion that there was little hope until the refugee's general condition could be improved The most satisfactory *ad hoc* treatment on the road was to wash the Naga sore thoroughly with soap and water, followed by alcohol and a mixture of acri-flavine in glycerine. If available it was then powdered with M and B 760 ; if not it might be packed with mag. sulphate and the whole covered with elastoplast. In not a few cases a Naga sore was complicated by the presence of hundreds of small maggots in the wound. On one occasion kerosene oil was poured into a hole in a small boy's head, and three hundred and fifty half-inch maggots, of four different species, were removed. The boy survived and is now fit and well. Such are the powers of human survival.

"I climbed on up the clayside into Nanki village, and visited the sick, and then on to the hill above the village. Here I found a few people who wanted to settle down for the night. They were without food, so I drove them down to Pahari. In a hut a long way off the track I found an Indian of the student type, who had been deserted by his friends. I ordered him to stand up, and after a lot of hesitation, he staggered to his feet, but fell down again. *I then saw that the tops of his feet had been completely rotted away by Naga sores.* I picked him up and carried him to another hut on the main track and left him there for the night. I gave him a biscuit, but he could not eat it as he had no water. I had none either, and I was too exhausted to help him further that day."*

Natural abortion was common in the jungle, and hæmorrhage was not infrequent.

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Under normal conditions a jungle leech does little harm ; it takes its fill of blood and drops-off its victim. But when people are starving it rapidly makes them very weak and tired. Their

* Extract from Capt Taimsh's diary.

resistance has been lowered and their blood takes a long time to coagulate, with the result that there is every opportunity for a secondary infection to establish itself. Many refugees declared that their Naga sores had started at the site of a leech bite. Ordinarily, a leech should not be pulled off, but it will let go at once if a burning cigarette-end or salt is applied to its tail—neither of which remedies are always readily available in the jungle. The large green and brown tiger leech appeared to be the most poisonous, its bite resulting in discoloration which would often last for several weeks. Whether hæmorrhage proved fatal in any but a very small percentage of cases of I cannot say; the real danger of leech bite would appear to be that it opens the way to other infections. Thousands of sandfly helped to add to the miseries of life in the jungle. Their bites feel like red hot needles, and unless disinfected quickly form a small scab, which in turn forms a sore smaller than the Naga sore and attacks the more fleshy parts of the legs, arms and buttocks. The treatment never wholly satisfactory, was much the same as for Naga sores. In the open parts of the jungle, and generally near a river, the "Dim-Dam" fly makes its appearance as soon as the monsoon is over. This is a small bloodsucking fly of quite regular habits. It appears when the sun has cleared the morning mist out of the valleys, and disappears as soon as the evening starts to get cool. It proved a curse to bare-legged porters, particularly whilst they were working in camps. On the road the dim-dam did not give a great deal of trouble, but in the camps it attacked porters, refugees, Liaison Officers and medical staff with strict impartiality. When not provided with plenty of soap, porters scratched their bites and their legs swelled rapidly, until they were eventually unable to work. Head lice and nits were common amongst the women and children refugees, and the flit pump was found to be the most expeditious way of dealing with the situation. After this had been repeated several times, each victim was given a piece of soap to wash the oil out of their heads. Hornets stings were also high up in the list of minor injuries, whilst jungle flies picked out their victims with terrifying and unerring judgment. Inevitably, they chose someone who had fallen by the wayside and was going to die. As soon as he or she had weakened enough to be no longer able to brush off the flies, egg clusters were laid on the neck and other parts of the body.

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There was never enough porters to carry everyone who was sick on the Ledo route, and there were many refugees, ill and ex-

hausted in the jungle, who might reasonably have claimed assistance but neither asked nor received it. To be carried in a blanket, through miles of deep mud, is almost as exhausting as walking. In order to make the best use of the porterage available, it was necessary to select only those who were strong enough to survive such a journey. For the most part the choice had to be made by Liaison Officers, who carried out this unpleasant but necessary duty with grim realism, permitting no accession of private emotion to influence strictly utilitarian decisions. In much the same way more than one mother was obliged, at some time or another, to choose between carrying her baby and her food, because she could not continue to transport both. If she took her baby she could take no food, in which case the chances were that neither would survive.

I have said that dysentery was the most prevalent major complaint on the trek, and particularly in the least healthy parts of the jungle. It was quite impossible to carry out the usual routine treatment for the disease, as this would have meant delaying refugees for a week or ten days. Neither food nor accommodation were available for this purpose, and it is perhaps a good thing that they were not. The refugees' morale was at its best when they were on the move. Once they started to sit around in crowded and dirty camps they seemed to fall victim to fresh complaints. To do them justice the vast majority of refugees were only too anxious to move on, and get to the end of the journey. If they had dysentery it was therefore necessary to treat them in such a way that they would be able to continue to progress from one camp to another. In camps fifty miles from the base dysentery cases were ordinarily divided into three groups. Those in which the disorder was of one or two days standing were given bacteriophage, two phages on arrival in camp, two in the evening and a couple before they left in the morning. Cases of three to four days standing were treated with liquid extract of kurchi, whilst cases which had been running for a longer period received appropriate doses of M & B 693 and 760. In addition to dysentery, there were other types of intestinal trouble, usually deriving from severe stomach chills contracted as a result of lying in the open at night for days on end—often in pouring rain. Those who ate uncooked food or were so starved that they were unable to digest their food when they got it, constituted another difficult category of sickness. By the middle of June, fifty per cent of the refugees were suffering from diarrhœa in one form or another. Refugees arriving in the forward camps in July had been existing on a few ounces of rice a day since the beginning of May, and their general condition was very bad—pallagra, hook

worm, Naga sores, malaria, amœba and scabies being common complaints amongst refugees who, not infrequently, were suffering from more than one disease at the same time. In July many children were successfully treated for pneumonia.

One who was on the Ledo road for the whole of the evacuation has told me that the most constant preoccupation in refugee work was the composition of the first meal, after an evacuee had been subjected to a long period of privation and hunger. Most starving people will overeat if they get a chance, and this first meal, even when carefully supervised was always a turning point. If it was properly assimilated and digested, the chances were that the recipient would pick up a little strength and a little more determination ; if not, it might well mean the beginning of fresh sickness. In addition to eating too much, starving people were also sorely tempted to attack their food before it had been properly cooked. To check this in Shamlung camp, one or two suitable refugee women were usually put in charge of the cooking pots and they cooked for everyone. The daily dietaries set out for European and Indian food eating evacuees in Indian Tea Association camps were as follows :—For every hundred Europeans there was allotted 20 lbs. of tinned beef, 65 lbs. of biscuits, 5 lbs. of tea, 5 lbs. of sugar, 3 lbs. of tinned milk and 5 lbs. of marmite. For every hundred Indians there were allotted 70 lbs. of rice, 15 lbs. of dhal, 5 lbs. of salt, 5 lbs of sugar, 3 lbs. of tinned milk and and 5 lbs. of tea. Thus 100 Europeans or 100 Indians received 103 lbs. of rations, a figure which may seem low, but which was more than adequate in view of the undesirability of giving large meals. In practice, those evacuees who were sufficiently fit sometimes obtained as much as double the fixed ration, whilst special additions to the standard dietary included chocolate, tinned fish, dried fruit and butter, which was issued to refugees at the discretion of Medical and Liaison Officers. One of the virtues of the I.T.A. " Q ", or commissariat, organisation was its flexibility and freedom from forms and regulations. Whether it was cooking utensils for porters, or boots for refugees, the required article appeared on the road with a minimum of delay.

The long and hazardous journey, left its mark on everyone who made it. It was noticeable that even those who appeared to be fairly fit on reaching the base camps cracked up sooner or later Sometimes the reaction set in a few hours after reaching Margherita; sometimes it was several weeks in coming. In retrospect, however, one can see very clearly that the medical staff on the Ledo Road, as on others, accomplished something that was very little short of a miracle in bringing this lost army of innocents to safety, in the face of the most dire threats to life and limb.

CHAPTER IX.

WITHDRAWAL AND THE END

ON June 7th a wireless message came through from Nampong to the effect that the time was approaching when the camp forward of the Pangsau would have to be withdrawn; and, indeed, if parties at Shinbiwyang had been prepared to comply with instructions to remain there until the rains were over, the main phase of the Ledo evacuation might well have come to an end during the month of June. Emergency withdrawal bridges had been constructed over the Tagung Hka and Nawngyang Hka, and the I.T.A. Road Commander decided that, on the facts as they were then known, a progressive withdrawal might be made during the last three weeks of June. He was influenced in this view by the fact that the track by now had completely broken up under the pressure from both animals and humans, and consisted almost entirely of mud, slippery boulders and pot holes. Heavy rain was almost continuous, and the rivers were in spate. The approaches to the rivers at Nawngyang and Tagung were particularly treacherous. Finally, porterage was becoming almost impossible, as the prevailing conditions had pushed the sickness rate up to approximately 50 per cent. In one week 23 deaths were reported among porters on the route, and foot sores were particularly prevalent. The stretch from Pahari up over the Pass constituted a very difficult stretch, and if porterage had been continued forward there was a serious risk of both camp staff and porters being completely cut off—a contingency which would in no way have helped the general progress of the evacuation.

Accordingly, orders were issued on June 7th to bring to a closure the Simon-Nampong supply route. Stocks at Simon were nearly exhausted, and if it was a correct assumption that the refugee traffic was coming to an end, enough supplies were moving up the Jeep Road to feed camp staff, porters and 700 refugees a day. The stock position was also considered to be healthy, and it was calculated that there were ten to fourteen days' reserves of European and Indian rations at Nampong. A Burma official coming through on June 9th reported that those left on the other side of the Namyung were not necessarily abandoned, as food was being dropped and recovered at Tagap Ga, and that the situation between Shinbiwyang and the Namyung Hka was

under the control of the Political Officer at the former place. The next ten days were a period of considerable anxiety. On the one hand, forward camps were being gradually abandoned; and on the other there was no absolute certainty that the refugees would, in fact, cease to come forward. Arrivals at Nampong would practically cease, only to increase the next day to several hundreds, a circumstance which was due to the rise and fall of the Namyung Hka, which I have already mentioned. Furthermore, the percentage of women and children was perceptibly increasing. The situation was also complicated by the possibility of a large number of Chinese troops coming through from Burma, in anticipation of which the Indian Tea Association organisation was required by the authorities to send up surplus supplies to forward camps, which were to pass under the control of the military authorities, if and when the Chinese troops arrived. Air reconnaissance had provided somewhat contradictory evidence as to the whereabouts of what ultimately proved to be the Chinese Fifth Army*, and the immediate effect of the latest set of orders which the I.T.A. received was to make it impossible for them to start sending back valuable medicines, tarpaulins, tools, etc. However, this was perhaps a blessing in disguise in view of what was to happen later on.

It was in the face of the above rather conflicting trends that the forward camps were gradually abandoned, being sent back as complete units, according to the Road Commissioner's plan. The actual sequence was as follows —

June 7th .. Ngalang Ga Camp withdrawn.

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* In the course of the lecture to the Royal Central Asian Society, to which I have referred in an earlier chapter, Brigadier General Whitworth said: "early in June, Headquarters Chinese Expeditionary Force arrived in Dibrugarh under the command of General Lo. I had many conferences with him regarding the extrication of the Fifth Army, the whereabouts of which was not exactly known, but which was reported to be approaching Shinbiwyang. All reconnaissance by the R.A.F. and the U.S.A.A.C. (who now had two squadrons in the area) had failed to locate any Chinese forces. We found them eventually on the Chindwin River at Dalu, and were able to drop a few loads of food, which they badly needed. They had been wandering through very sparsely inhabited country for some weeks. A fortnight later, just as the Pangsau route was becoming impassable, the leading regiment arrived at Shinbiwyang. . . . . After many anxious conferences between General Lo, Lambert (a frontier Political Officer) and myself, Lambert proposed what he called a 'desperate expedient,' namely to bring out the Chinese by Naga footpaths to the south-east of the Pangsau route." In this Lambert and his colleagues succeeded. Brigadier Whitworth added that the Chinese troops "were in a pitiable condition of starvation and of sickness, and their progress along what was now known as 'the Lambert route,' was a slow and painful one. The determination of the Chinese soldier not to abandon any weapon of war was most remarkable. A soldier who was not really able to walk unladen would bring along a 3" mortar even if he could only make a quarter of a mile a day.

June 10th .. Tagung Hka Camp withdrew The remaining stores were handed over to a British soldier who was the forerunner of a party of 7 officers and 15 B.O Rs. There was also a report of 200 more refugees having crossed the Namyung. On June 10th 600 evacuees passed through Nampong.

June 11th .. Nawngyang Hka Camp withdrew. Notices in English and Hindustani were left in prominent places at each camp to let evacuees know what was ahead. On this date the European staff at Nawngyang Hka were particularly under the weather.

June 14th .. Shamlung Camp withdrew as the Abor porterage could no longer be maintained. After magnificent work the Abors were gradually released in consequence of severe sickness and fatalities, and all were back at the base by June 20th. At Shamlung it was necessary to leave a few refugees with swollen legs, who would be able to walk after a few days' rest. They were given ten days' rations, and it is not without interest to note that when a back reconnaissance was made from Nampong to Shamlung a few days later, these sick people were quite comfortable and selling biscuits at exhorbitant prices to new arrivals.

June 15th .. Pahari Camp withdrew to Nampong.

On June 14th the Simon-Nampong supply route was finally closed down. A limited quantity of stores were left at Namgoi Mukh under a Naga chowkidar, the godowns being made as water-tight as possible. By June 16th all Pnar and Khasi porters had returned to base, which made porterage difficult even up to Nampong, the work being done by the remaining Garos, together with 1,300 volunteer tea garden labour and the much depleted P.P.C.

On June 13th an attempt had been made, by dropping messages, to stop further refugees crossing the Namyung. The wording of the advice seems to have been quite definite, and from what became known later it seems very doubtful whether an even more peremptory communication would have had the desired effect. On June 16th very definite instructions, signed by Major-General Wood, the Administrator-General, were dropped at Tagap Ga, ordering refugees to return to Shinbiwyang as the Pangsau route was now considered impossible. They were informed that they would be cared for at Shinbiwyang. As it was ascertained from ground replies to aerial messages that the Commissioner of Myitkyina was at Tagap Ga on this date there appeared some chance that evacuees would comply with the instructions. Later, Mr. McGuire, the official in question, reported that he read this message out to a large gathering of refugees, of whom he estimated there were about 2,500 then on the wrong side of the Namyung. By a majority of 75 per cent. the evacuees decided to continue on their way and not return to

Shinbiwyang, their decision being influenced by the fact that at that juncture the weather was improving rapidly and causing the river to fall. In addition, the road from Namyung to Shinbiwyang was said to be in a terrible state—even worse than anything on the Assam side of the Namyung, a claim which relief workers found it very difficult to believe. But there was a run of fine weather between June 17th and 20th, and it seems clear that the Namyung fell during and immediately after these three days, enabling at least 2,500 refugees to cross the river before it rose again.

Meanwhile, what were hoped would be final 'mopping up' operations were being carried out by the relief organisation. On June 16th, in response to an appeal for ponies to aid the evacuation of non-walking cases from Nampong, a party of 20 mules went up under Captain England, the Mule Company Commander. They overcame the most appalling conditions, crossing the Pangsau and bringing back sick and injured evacuees from Shamlung returning to the base by June 23rd. This was regarded as an exceptional performance, for which the personality of Captain England himself was largely responsible. On June 17th two Burmese elephants, which had previously been working at Namgoi Mukh, on the Simon-Nampong supply route, left Nampong for Shamlung with a senior Liaison Officer and a doctor. Seventy new arrivals were found at Shamlung, and the elephants brought back a number of sick, as well as children. By June 20th this camp had been cleared of all but the dead. Communications were difficult at this critical stage, as after the 11th June wireless messages could not be received at Ledo from Nampong, although it continued to be possible for Ledo to send messages to Nampong until for a further week. But the *dak* system was working well, and stage runners took an average of 36 hours from Nampong to Ledo.

At this time there was no definite news of when the military intended to take over the forward camps, in preparation for the exodus of the Chinese Fifth Army, nor as to the termination of the evacuee traffic. As a precaution, orders were given by the Indian Tea Association that no downward movement of stores should take place, and the Chief Liaison Officer and the Road Commander had perforce to proceed on the assumption that the I.T.A. relief organisation would be required to carry on to at least June 30th. But the problem of finding labour interposed itself with increasing embarrassment. All the volunteer tea garden gangs were due for repatriation between June 20th and June 27th, and it was therefore necessary to recruit a further 300 volunteers, which were actually forthcoming from the adjacent

Margherita district. Liaison Officers were having difficulty in holding some of the original gangs to their full contract, and none would volunteer for a further period, owing to a run of deaths at Tirap, the cause of which was never traced.

* * * *

The third week of June seems to have marked a turning point in the course of the evacuation by the Ledo route, and consequently of the relief operations as well. By now it had begun to be apparent that instead of a definite conclusion being reached by the end of the month, rescue work might have to continue for a further unpredictable period. This diagnosis was confirmed by McGuire, the Commissioner of Myitkyina, who had arrived on June 25th, and could speak with some knowledge of the state of affairs at the Burma end. But, even prior to that date, information had come to hand which suggested that winding-up plans would have to be reconsidered. On June 21st word had come to the Road Commander at Nampong that 6 officers and 38 men had arrived at Shamlung, and that there were between 2,000 and 3,000 evacuees behind them who had crossed the Namyung in the previous few days. This party had clearly failed to receive, or had disregarded, the orders issued by the Administrator-General. It was fortunate indeed that a reserve of rations existed in forward camps, and these were supplemented by air dropping of sugar, tinned milk and biscuits at points between the Pangsau and Namyung Hka on June 25th, bad weather having held up air operations for the three previous days. Further porterage over the Pass appeared to be impracticable.

On June 26th, at the suggestion of the Indian Tea Association a meeting was called to consider a proposition whereby it was thought a number of additional lives might be saved. This conference was attended by the 4th Corps Commander and the Northern Brigade Area Commander, Lt.-General Irwin and Brigadier Whitworth respectively, together with the Administrator Refugee Areas (North) and representatives of the Indian Tea Association. It was agreed that 200 Assam Rifles should be brought from Sadiya to go up the road as a flying column with light equipment and, using Nampong as a forward base, should make a dash over the Pangsau Pass as far as Nawngyang Hka to bring in as many refugees as possible. It was judged that there would only be time for them to make one such trip before the evacuees were either through or had perished. The Assam Rifles had already made a name for themselves on the road, where they had done excellent work in various

camps guarding cash, carrying out patrol work and general police duties. They had also effected several arrests of those who had robbed their fellow evacuees. Commanded by Indian officers, they were willing at all times to co-operate in many tasks which, strictly speaking, were outside their own duties, and they were always anxious to lend a hand in cooking food or issuing rations or searching the jungle for food dropped by plane. Thus nobody of men were better suited by training and temperament to undertake this special dash forward, by which it was hoped to bring in a good many stragglers who would otherwise be left to their fate Commanded by Captain Keene, with four Indian Officers, these two hundred men made a grand effort, their time table reading as follows:—June 28th arrived Tipong; June 29th left Tipong; July 2nd reached Nampong; July 3rd went over the Pass and camped at Shamlung; July 4th went to Nawngyang Hka and beyond, bringing in sick and weak; July 5th returned to Nampong; July 11th reached base. Their performance was somewhat handicapped by the fact that it was apparently necessary for them to take up full kits to Nampong, and only slightly lightened kits over the Pass. There were no porters available to assist them, and they also had definite orders that they were to return to base after one journey forward to Nawngyang. Actual results, therefore, were somewhat disappointing. They were able to bring into Shamlung a dozen stretcher cases, and about thirty walking cases who had to be assisted in various degrees. They would undoubtedly have brought more, had more been found; but these were all that were on the stretch forward of Shamlung at the time. After a very arduous twelve days the Assam Rifles returned to base in excellent trim. But they were not the only ones who went up the road on special, and what were thought to be last minute missions. On June 27th the Mule Company Commander took fifty animals forward, twenty to Nampong and over the Pass again, and thirty to work on the lower stretches. On the same date the Chief Liaison Officer and the Principal Medical Officer began a forward trek with the object of issuing final orders for retirement, and at one stage of the journey they walked from Nampong to Shamlung and back in one day, which under the conditions then prevailing was no mean feat. They found, however, that by July 1st refugee traffic had increased to 115 a day at Shamlung, and whilst the intention to close the I.T.A. organisation still had to be adhered to, no final date could be named for the purpose. Indeed, the fortnight June 28th to July 10th was a period during which it was necessary to hang on in the camps as far forward as possible, in order to bring through the remainder of those who had

crossed the Namyung River between June 17th and June 20th Returning to base on July 3rd, the Chief Liaison Officer and the Principal Medical Officer accordingly discussed the situation with the Refugee Administrator (North), whose duties and title derived from the recent division of the evacuee routes of Assam into three parts,—North, Central and South, for each of which an administrator had been nominated by the Administrator-General. The doubts as to whether the refugee traffic was really coming to end, which both the Chief Liaison Officer and the Principal Medical Officer now entertained, were supported by the reports of other Liaison Officers, who had been making forward reconnaissances from Shamlung to Tagung Hka. There was also the evidence of R.A.F. pilots who were engaged in food dropping and reconnaissance in the neighbourhood of the most outlying camps. Collating all the available intelligence, it was estimated that on July 4th there were between 400 and 800 refugees footing it between Namyung Hka and Tagung Hka, with between 60 and 70 arriving each day at the latter place; from Tagung Hka 150 were on the move, and the Medical Officer at Shamlung reported *that approximately 100 were arriving daily. The Chief Liaison* Officer estimated that 500 more were journeying between Nampong and Margherita on July 7th, whilst the rest camp records show that no less than 1,600 reached Margherita on July 8th. Such was the picture which confronted the conference between the representatives of the Indian Tea Association and the Administrator (North), who had also received information from New Delhi that, although air dropping arrangements were being made to feed evacuees still concentrated in Shinbiwyang, it might be necessary, for reasons of a confidential nature, to investigate the possibility of further reducing the numbers left in that ill-fated place. Speaking for the Indian Tea Association, the Chief Liaison Officer indicated that whilst the Association was prepared to maintain its organisation on the road until the end of the month, no camps could be maintained forward of Lekhapani after July 31st. This decision was based on the fact that, although it might be possible, at considerable risk to life and health, to maintain camps and rationing as far as Nampong by continual changes of labour and personnel, it was highly unlikely that the necessary medical staff, porters, etc., would be forthcoming. The meeting agreed that conditions on the other side of the Pangsau were now so bad that few evacuees could hope to get through, and that it would be foolish and uneconomical to continue to employ a large number of Liaison Officers, Indian clerical and medical staff and tea garden labour on this work, when their services were so much in demand for urgent projects

such as road making and aerodromes in other parts of Assam. By this time both Liaison Officers and Indian Medical staff were thoroughly played out, and with many high priority commitments on hand the tea industry had literally no reserves of man-power left. Orders were accordingly despatched to officers up the road, and the withdrawal of camps began about July 11th to the accompaniment of "back reconnaissances", which partook largely of the nature of rescue operations. On that day, for instance, a back reconnaissance to Shamlung was undertaken by the Acting Road Commander, a Medical Officer and a Liaison Officer together with 163 tea garden labourers. They took up rations, which proved to be unnecessary as the R.A.F. had already dropped large supplies, which early refugees had commandeered to sell to later arrivals. The camp was finally cleared of 80 persons, including many stretcher cases. Only four refugees came in from Nawngyang that day. The following day, July 12th, Nampong was cleared of all evacuees, but substantial quantities of food and medical supplies were left behind under the care of a Naga headman, and the same procedure was followed at all camps back as far as Tirap. Between July 12th and 18th, Namgoi, Namchick, Buffalo, Kumlao and North Tirap were evacuated, an extra day being required at Buffalo to clear the hospital. On July 18th a total of 68 stretcher cases were brought down from North Tirap to Lekhapani, most of them being in very poor condition and a number of them ultimately dying. The Chief Liaison Officer ordered a final reconnaissance to Shamlung by two Liaison Officers and 90 tea garden coolies, who left Lekhapani on July 20th, reaching Nampong three days later. On the outward journey they found one evacuee at North Tirap, two at Kumlao, eight at Punglung, twenty-six at Namgoi and thirty-two at Nampong. The Chief Liaison Officer then flew over the route in an R.A.F. plane. North Tirap, Namchick, Nampong, the Pangsau Pass and Shamlung were clearly recognised, but Kumlao, Buffalo and Namki could not be identified with certainty. At Shamlung, one person who was apparently a European waved to the plane, but other camps forward of the Pangsau appeared to be deserted. At Nampong, the two Liaison Officers had put out ground strips indicating that there were only 69 refugees between Shamlung and the base. The plane then flew on over the Namyang Hka, which appeared to be very wide, and likely to be difficult to cross. Beleaguered Shinbiwyang was circled a dozen times, and medical supplies were dropped. At Tagap Ga a ground strip *s.o.s.* was laid out asking for tinned food, milk and ghee, a message which was answered by dropping of supplies, together with instructions

The Mishmi guide who led the rescue party to the Dapha, marching through the night in time to save a party of 68 refugees, who had been stranded on an island for 7 days without food. Within two hours of the last refugee being removed, the island was swept bare by the raging torrent. The same man, with fifteen others from his village, later went forward with food for a party making their way from the Chaukan to Mackrell's camp

G D L. Millar who, with Leyden and a few porters, constituted the advance party which, after many privations and forced marches, made the historic dash which brought relief to the Rowland and Rossiter parties stranded on the Chaukan

that all those there were to return to Shinbiwyang, as no more rations would be dropped.

On July 27th, 75 tea garden coolies went up to Shamlung with a Liaison Officer and brought back a dozen stretcher cases. Evacuees located on the route, or in huts, brought the total between Shamlung and Nampong to just over one hundred. Those en route could all proceed slowly, but many had ample supplies of rations and were moving at a very leisurely rate. For the most part they were in very poor condition and verminous and filthy. There was also more evidence of looting, robbery and extortion, whilst of 26 recently dead between Nampong and Shamlung the majority were women who appeared to be of good class. Their ornaments had been removed It was impossible to obtain reliable information as to the numbers of evacuees between Namyang Hka and Shamlung, but a message from a political officer, who was engaged in reconnaissance on another route, stated that there was no one at Namyang Hka, and only a few sick at Tagap Ga.

All camps had deteriorated considerably in the short time they had been unoccupied, but godowns were well stocked and chowkidars were doing their duty, though it seemed that the ravages of the climate would soon render the foodstuffs unfit for use. The work of the Indian Tea Association on the Shinbiwyang-Ledo evacuation route had now come to an end, and it only remained for the Administrator Refugee Areas to make arrangements to deal with the small number of evacuees who were expected to come through during the remainder of the rains. These arrangements were finalised, and camps up to Namchick were taken over by the military authorities by August 15th, whilst a Political Officer was henceforth to exercise a supervisory interest in the welfare of the very limited number of evacuees who were now expected to come through. As a matter of actual fact this apparently simple transfer of authority and resources was subsequently found to be far from adequate to the situation which developed when, later in the year, other parties of refugees started to arrive at the Pangsau from Shinbiwyang, in the face of orders to the contrary. After its withdrawal, the Indian Tea Association left a representative on the scene who, when the need rose, was able to provide tea garden labour to go as far forward as Nampong and Nawngyang to establish temporary camps. Shinbiwyang was not finally cleared until the end of November, when it was threatened by approaching forces of Japanese. And although the period to November was intermittently one of high purpose and achievement, it does not constitute any part of my story, which ends with the formal withdrawal from this route of

the Indian Tea Association relief organisation on July 31st, 1942. During the period May 18th to July 31st, 20,344 evacuees were brought to safety and the Association's rest camp at Margherita. This simple statement of dates and the figure is, I think, more eloquent of the success of an errand of mercy, unprecedented in scope and character, than any further words of mine can be. But it is perhaps worth emphasising that the total number of refugees who passed through the Association's hands was slightly more than double the original official estimate, a tribute to the elasticity and adaptability of the organisation to which Government wisely entrusted this unique mission.

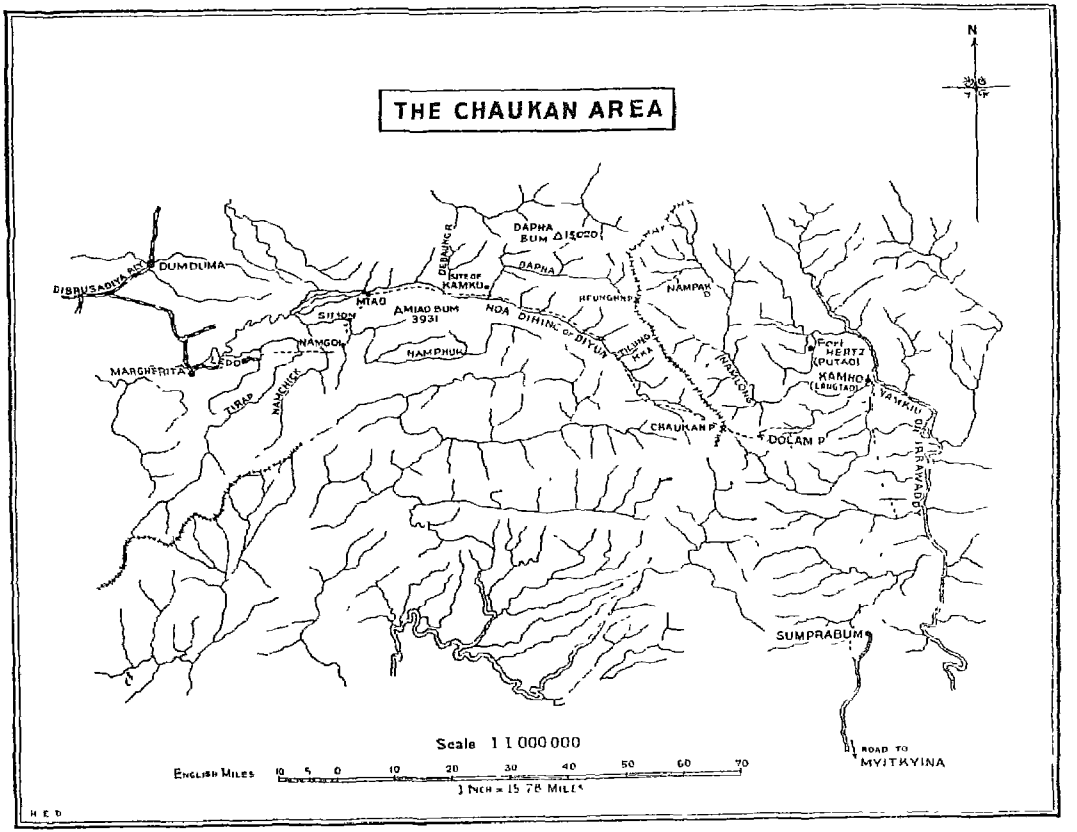
CHAPTER X

EPIC OF THE CHAUKAN

I COME now to the almost epic story of the Chaukan Pass rescue I use the adjective advisedly and after due thought; for although in my opinion the relief expedition over the Pangsau is unequalled in its own field as an example of courage, discipline and tenacity, there are certain qualities in the Chaukan narrative which entitle it to a place amongst the epic deeds of history. What the tea industry did in the evacuation over the Pangsau Pass called for large scale organisation, the employment of several hundred planters and thousands of labourers in a grim struggle for months along a straggling front, and against odds that were compounded of the worst that man and nature could do to man himself. If a military metaphor may be applied, the Pangsau expedition can be likened to the prolonged and grisly trench warfare which was a characteristic of the last war, whilst the Chaukan rescue partakes of the nature of a minor diversion—a dashing cavalry operation and, withal, a heroic story, as I hope the succeeding pages will show. In order that the principal strands of a rather complicated narrative should be as clear as possible to the ordinary reader, I have eschewed all references by name to the numerous Liaison Officers and others engaged in relief work on the Dimapur, Silchar and Hukwang Valley routes. Where so many are worthy of personal mention it would have been unfair to relief workers and the reader alike to introduce a catalogue of names which, with the best will in the world, would almost certainly have revealed important omissions. But the Chaukan Pass episode stands on a different footing. In one sense the canvas is smaller, and unless the principal characters are introduced by name the story would be quite unintelligible to all but a small minority who have individual knowledge, derived at first or second hand, of this strange odyssey. In justice to all concerned, I want to make it clear that this is the sole criterion by which the matter has been judged. Indeed, when I intimated my decision to the principal figure in the Chaukan relief operations he begged to be spared further publicity, and said quite simply that he judged his own performance as in no way more meritorious than that of any Liaison Officer on the Pangsau route who was called on, as part of his morning routine, to clear the corpses out of a basha hut to make way for the next batch of sickness and death. I will do my best to observe his wishes and to make what

follows hereafter an objective, but not I hope colourless, narrative.

The Chaukan adventure started in roughly the same conditions as the Hukwang exodus, but was slightly different as to time and the point from which a little band of British and Indian refugees, caught in North Burma, decided to make a bid for India. But first a word about the Chaukan Pass itself. G. D. L. Millar's diary, which I have before me as I write (I make frequent reference to Millar later on) describes it as "truly a forgotten world, where solitude reigns supreme." He records that for over a hundred miles not only was there no trace of man. but mammal and even bird life was conspicuous by its absence, The Chaukan Pass is at the North-western end of the great mountain barrier lying between Burma and India, and in places it rises to a height of between nine and ten thousand feet. The fact is that up to the summer of 1942 only 5 Europeans had crossed the Chaukan, all nearly 50 years ago. Errol Gray made the journey in 1892 and Woodthorpe and MacGregor did it together two years later Prince Henry of Orleans crossed it in 1897 in his trans-Asiatic journey from India to China, and one Prichard, of whose journey little is known, did it sometime later. These were expeditions led by men who were in a measure professional geographers or explorers; they were well equipped and they made the journey under relatively favourable cold weather conditions. But even they had their fatalities, and certainly hitherto no European had hitherto been known to make the journey in the rains. Apart from the mountain itself, the great obstacle, as Mackrell's relief expedition in the summer of 1942 discovered, is the Dapha River which flows into the Dehing at a point roughly half-way between the Chaukan Pass and Ledo, the place which the reader will remember was the Indian terminus of the Shinbiwyang-Pangsau evacuee route. Not one of the party which set out from Fort Hertz in Upper Burma to reach India by the Chaukan route can have had any conception of what the journey entailed nor, as Millar puts it, "of the tragedies that were shortly to be enacted in that forgotten country of mountains, gorges and heavy rivers." Their initial plans seem to have been unduly optimistic, and their meagre resources were quite inadequate to the journey as it developed. But as with the refugees on other routes, high courage and grim determination, and the chance of help from India, served to make up for the grave deficiency of more material things. It is not for an arm chair critic to say how far they were justified in setting out so ill-equipped and in the face of a rapidly advancing monsoon. Millar, who ultimately did such sterling work in the little advance party that brought aid to the main body behind, writing soon after says


THE CHAUKAN AREA
N
DUMDUMA
DIBRUSADIYA R.
MARGHERITA
MIAO
AMIAO BUM
3931
NOA DIHING
DAPHA BUM
DAPHA
DEBANG R.
SITE OF KAMKU
NAMGOL
NAMPHUK
NAMCHIK
TIRAP
HEUNGHNP
NAMPAK
NAMYONG
CHAUKAN P
DOLAM P
Fort HERTZ
KUTAOI
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VAWKLI
IRRAWADDY
SUMPRABUM
ROAD TO
MYITKYINA
Scale 1 1 000 000
ENGLISH MILES
10 5 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70
1 INCH = 15 78 MILES
H E D

"It is not as though they were on a route—they were a party of men, women and children advancing through almost impenetrable country along a trail marked by us by scarring trees. An army of searchers might go out to meet them, but unless they could find our trail, it would be like searching for a needle in a haystack. Their compass course might well be a parallel route many miles away from the line decided on. The truth is we got through ourselves by three strokes of luck, and looking back in retrospect on those black days towards the end, the recollections of which curiously enough do not come clearly to my mind, it is apparent we had taken a chance which might not succeed again. How immeasurably great was our reason to be thankful that we did not delay our departure by two days further to provision ourselves, and that my friend Gyles Mackrell, who led out the rescue party worked at such speed from the moment we contacted him, will be seen by him who reads on. The blunt fact is that two days later there would have been no survivors, and this account would not have been written."

* * * *

And now I would ask the reader to return once more to the starting point in Burma. Fort Hertz (sometimes shown as Putao on the maps) and Sumprabum, a robustious place name that subsequently figured prominently in Allied air communiques, had by early May, 1942, become small evacuation centres subsidiary to the main concentration at Myitkyina. Against the thousands who gathered in Myitkyina, never more than a few hundred considered the possibilities of journeying to India from Fort Hertz and Sumprabum *via* the Chaukan; and mercifully not all of those who turned the idea over in the minds decided to act upon it. Anything in the nature of a large scale evacuation *via* the Chaukan must inevitably have culminated in disaster on a scale one shudders to contemplate. Though they may not have been well found, those who did come this way had the advantage of the mobility of relatively small parties, and their experiences are a pointer to what would have befallen a general exodus over this wild mountain route. It seems clear that the authorities were aware of the tragic possibilities in the situation, for official warnings were issued from both Burma and India that the Chaukan route should not, except as a very last resort, be attempted. A diary written by an official at the time reads:

> "May 9th.
> At Sumprabum to-day the matter of the Chaukan route was discussed with . . . . and it was decided that the government party, including the Commissioner, should not take this difficult route.

> In the course of the past two days I have stopped at least 500 Europeans from going up to this route, but local information shows that several parties, all European and all inadequately rationed and portered, have left Sumprabum travelling northwards. These parties had to be brought back, so I left Sumprabum at 5 p.m for Kawnan, first stage on the Putao road and finally reached there in time to turn back four parties of Europeans whose rations were sparse and whose Kachin coolies refused to go on. I may add that one of these parties had been strongly advised in Sumprabum not to attempt the Chaukan Pass, but they proceeded in spite of the advice. A large notice, setting forth the difficulties of the route and warning people not to attempt it, was put up in Sumprabum."

It is necessary to mention this aspect of the matter, lest it be thought that the authorities on both sides of the Indo-Burmese border were ignorant of, or indifferent to, the perils that must attend the Chaukan journey. Additionally it seems clear that about the middle of May orders were given for messages to be dropped on Fort Hertz telling people already there to stay put until the cold weather, and that the R.A F. were requested to make sure that they were received. I do not know how much importance was attached to these communications by the recipients, but it is certain that they were not acted upon literally, and at best they seem to have succeeded in diverting a number of evacuees from the more hazardous Chaukan venture to the Daru Pass-Hukwang Valley route to India. Mention of this is relevant, because it is only one of the circumstances indicating that there was more than a little confusion of thought and action at the beginning of a venture which essentially called for clear and precise planning. I am not trying to be wise after the event. In the circumstances in which these courageous men and women set off, determination and resolution was probably a greater asset to them than exact preparation. Also, if they were to cross the Chaukan in the van of a rapidly advancing monsoon it was essential to move off with as little delay as possible It was thus not so much a question of electing for this or that kind of expedition, but of accepting or rejecting an irrevocable decision to attempt the Chaukan ; for once seriously launched on this project there could be no question of them retracing their steps and trying an alternative route into India. Sir John Rowland's party, whose vicissitudes bulk so largely in this part of my story, seem to have been influenced to some extent by the views of one of their number, Moses, who was a mining prospector who claimed some knowledge of the country.

Others went the Chaukan way, because friends had decided to do so, and they could join up and journey together ; or because they were trapped in North-West Burma and felt it was the only route that offered a quick exit to India. Finally, to some, it became evident as the days passed that the Myitkyina-Shinbiw-

yang-Ledo route would be crowded with thousands of evacuees from the first named place, and the Chaukan was thought to offer easier going, with less pressure on the meagre resources of the country. In one of the many papers and reports which I have examined, there is even an unworthy allegation that the leader of one party tried to deter the leader of another from travelling by the Chaukan for merely selfish reasons, and in order to preserve its supposed amenities for himself and his companions. In retrospect the idea seems preposterous; but it is clear that not everyone who made the attempt regarded the Chaukan route as a counsel of despair. Some even appear to have built it up in their imagination as a more exclusive, clubable sort of route than the others. So that for different reasons no one was prepared to listen to the voice of Authority, from a distance of several hundred miles, exhorting them to 'stay put' and await relief in some indefinite future, which could not be earlier than the cold weather of 1942-43. Equally, none of them could foresee that a quarter of the way down the narrow uninhabited valley of the Noa Dehing they would be forced to a halt for approximately six weeks, unable to move either backward or forward. On May 9th a wireless message was sent from the small military outpost at Suprabum to the Governor of Burma, then in India, and the military authorities in that country, to the effect that official and military parties, totalling possibly 100 persons, would be proceeding *via* the Chaukan Pass and would require assistance in the shape of food, medical supplies and guides to be sent out to them from Assam. Direct wireless communication with India was not possible, and this communication had to be sent *via* Chungking, the capital of unoccupied China. Actually Mackrell had rescued 101 souls by June 17th and there were still a good many more to come. So once again original estimates of the number of evacuees had been seriously underestimated.

* * * *

A more detailed description of the vicissitudes which the Chaukan travellers were to suffer will be found in succeeding pages. But of the general nature of this journey, literally into the unknown, all contemporary records agree that quite a few villages, shown by the map as being on the route, do not exist. Mr. Ronald Jardine's diary says "it is of interest to note that after passing through the village of N'pyengaung on the Hpanngma river about eight miles south-west of Kamho (sometimes called Langtao on the maps) on the 14th May, there was no village or human habitation until we reached Mr. Mackrell's camp on the Dapha River 38 days later on June 21st." He then

names several villages which, despite the maps, have either never existed at all, or have ceased to exist for reasons such as apply to the case of Kamku—a large village which was formerly located about two miles north of the confluence of the Dapha and the Dihing Rivers, but which was abandoned some years ago as a result of feuds between the Mishmis and the Nagas. Mr. Jardine has also left on record a good description of the kind of country through which both rescued and rescuers had slowly to make their way. From Fort Hertz up to the foot of the Chaukan Pass the country is densely wooded with thick jungle between trees. From Kamho, which is approximately thirteen hundred feet above sea level, the route goes practically to the source of the Hpaungma River Kha near the Dolam Pass, but by constantly crossing ranges of hills, between two thousand and six thousand feet high, it eliminates some of the interminable winding that is the chief characteristic of the river's course. At the risk of running ahead of the actual movement of the evacuees, I may say that from the Dolam Pass the party cut down south-west until they hit the Namyak River, whose left bank they followed up to the Chaukan Pass (8,000 feet). "Even at the Pass itself there are no open spaces" says Jardine, and he adds "the reports I had heard of there being pine trees on the Pass are quite untrue. The trees at the Pass are of mixed nondescript varieties, and are all covered from top to bottom with damp moss." It is clear from Jardine's notes that for a sizeable part of the journey, *i.e.* from the Chaukan Pass down to the point where the Dapha River joins the Dihing or Diyun River, the track is of an exceedingly tenuous character. The jungle comes right down to the river, whose banks are generally steep so that in the heavy rain, which characterised most of the journey, neither Jardine nor any of his companions were able, except for very short distances, to walk dry shod along the river side. "For about fifty per cent of the time we had to wade in the river over very treacherous bolders in water some three feet deep, this frequently became impossible when cliffs came sheer down to the river, or the banks were particularly steep. It was then necessary to leave the river and cut our way over the hills through some of the thickest jungle that even three such experienced Forest men as Boyt, Gardiner and McCrindle of our party, had ever met." To add to their difficulties they had to cross twenty-three large tributaries in addition to the main river. Most of them were in flood and could only be traversed at great personal risk and with the aid of small trees, which the party felled with three dahs* and two kukries† they had with

* dah=a large spear. † kukri=a scythe like knife.

them. From the Chaukan Pass they never made more than six or seven miles a day, except on two out of the twenty-one days they took to do this section, and their average daily march was only four or five miles, although they marched eight and nine hours a day. Jardine says: "this scrambling round rock faces, alternating with cutting away over innumerable hills rising and falling two or three thousand feet, two or three times a day was very exhausting in our starved condition, and one of our greatest trials was having to build a shelter every night, generally in heavy rain. When we could find plantain leaves and bamboo the building of a shelter took 1½ hours, but generally we had to cut saplings and use smaller leaves for roofing which took us about three hours Dry wood was unobtainable, and the making of even a small fire was very difficult."

* * * *

The case of Mr. G. D. L. Millar is not necessarily representative of every Chaukan evacuee, but because he played an important role in blazing the trail across the Pass, and because he has left on record a brief but graphic account of his experience, I propose to try to follow him in the first stages of the journey to India. Millar arrived at Fort Hertz on May 10th when Rossiter, the Deputy-Commissioner, requested him to go up to the Pass with what he describes as "the Government Party". When the Pass was reached he was ultimately to lead an advance party into Assam, and bring back a relief party to the main body of evacuees. Rossiter and Millar journeyed from Fort Hertz to Khamho between May 11th and 13th, and were eventually joined at the latter place by the balance of their party. There were other parties, but they set out on May 14th about 150 strong, the whole consisting of some 30 European and Indian officers, and 120 Kachin and Nung porters and provisions for 26 days. Millar records the names of the Europeans as:—Sir John Rowland, Messrs. Mandley, Milne, Kendall, Whitehouse, Moses, Eadon, Burgess Barnett, Malloy, Leyden, Jardine, Lecky Thomson, Millar and Rossiter and Mrs. Rossiter and child. For the first two days progress was slow, and on the 16th evening it was decided to call what Millar describes in his diary as a council of war. He adds:

> "I insisted on the necessity of an advance party starting immediately if help were to arrive in time from the Assam side. Unfortunately the porters that day had confined themselves to rice loads only, leaving the stores boxes and most of my personal baggage to be brought up later. To wait for this would mean a delay of two or three days, and so we decided to risk setting off the next morning with rice for 14 days, a

little dal and just a sprinkling of other stores, which in fact were . one tin of milk, 1½ tins bully beef, 7 lbs. flour and 3 lbs. of potatoes and onions, and a little sugar, tea, jam and salt.

John Leyden additional D. C. of Myitkyina and I, with 13 Nung porters, a cook and Goal Miri my elephant tracker, and Leyden's little spaniel Misa set off on the 17th morning early. From that morning onwards we had continuous heavy rain both day and night for 9 days up to the 27th morning. I do not think it stopped raining for more than a few minutes each 24 hours of this period. We followed the course of the Nam Yak river up to the Pass, crossing it 18 times on the day of reaching the Pass, which was the 19th. The going was extremely difficult, the river being fordable only with difficulty at several crossings. We therefore left a note on the Pass for Rossiter when he should arrive, advising him to send forward all the strong members of his party in order to conserve rations. The weaker members and women and children would have to make shorter marches. In truth, from that time onwards I had grave fears as to whether any but the strongest members would be able to proceed at more than 2 or 3 miles a day ; it was therefore important that as few as possible should be left behind to require rations over a longer period."

From the Pass westwards, Millar and Leyden made only very slow progress, and for two days had to cut their way by compass through thick bamboo jungle along an 8,000 foot contour. When they came out on to the Dehing River they found very heavy water, which was not fordable at any point, even at this height above sea-level. But formidable as the Dehing may have appeared to the little party battling a way over the roof of the world it was, by comparison, a much easier proposition than the Dapha River which they were later to cross, and which constituted the great natural obstacle to Mackrell's rescue expedition coming forward from Assam. A mixture of melting mountain snow and monsoon rains turned the Dapha into a raging torrent. But I am anticipating events. By May 26th Millar and Leyden had come into flatter country, where they saw the first signs of animal life, a herd of twentysix sambhur deer and a tiger. Goal Miri shot one of the sambhur, and whilst they were cutting it up and the Nung coolies were eating the flesh, raw and warm, the herd stood about showing no fear at the presence of human beings, whom Millar considers they had never seen before. He says it was an amazing sight. The animals stood around in an interested sort of way, some lying down at only 60 yards distance.

As they went on they had to jettison everything that was not essential. Guns were thrown into the river ; cameras, binoculars, maps, instruments etc., were ruined by incessant rain and cast into the jungle. They had no tent and they carried their wet bedding all day in order to sleep in its sodden folds at night. On many occasions it was impossible to get a fire going, either to cook or to dry clothes. Leeches, blister flies and sand-

flies attacked them without remission. Leyden suffered a bad fall crossing a stream, and from then onwards had to be helped over the stretches of difficult climbing that occurred with depressing frequency. The little spaniel Misa disappeared over the edge of a bluff and the two men, sad at heart, concluded she had fallen into the Dehing Gorge below. Actually, one of the kinder dispensations of Providence decreed that this remarkable little dog should be found alive by those who were following behind Millar's advance party. She had given birth to five pups and in her lonely predicament managed to rear three of them! Planes flew over nearly every day, a fact which sustained them in the view that the messages sent out from Sumprabhum early in the month had moved the Indian authorities to action. They made smoke signals whenever they could, but had little expectation that they would be seen, for the weather was atrocious and visibility almost nil. Supplies were running low, and the original full rations, meagre enough, had to be cut down by half before May 27th, the day on which they had calculated they would reach the confluence of the Dehing and Dapha rivers. At this point they had less than three days food left, but hope ran high that they were now within striking distance of the Dapha and possible aid. Where, or how, they had miscalculated is unimportant now; or indeed, whether any reliable calculation was possible in the circumstances in which they had travelled for a fortnight. The fact was that they were far short of the dreaded, yet longed for, Dapha. Turning back to Millar's diary at this point I find it reads as follows:—

> "What a dismal mistake! From the 27th onwards the going was extremely difficult. Progress down the side of the Dehing was tortuous A maze of large boulders some 15 feet in height average, with deep pools between, and in places where the gorge rose sheer it became work for trained climbers, and our fears for the porters carrying loads were not without cause. Leyden's condition deteriorated rapidly—he had constant fever and his feet were in a very bad condition. Our shoes were all now beyond use, and we daily carried strings of cane wound round our middles as a supply for our feet en route. Without this cane bound round our feet we should have been unable to proceed.
>
> We gave out the last of the rice on the morning of Sunday the 31st, a day which does not bear recalling, and still no Dapha river—5 days over-due. That morning our one hope of survival seemed to be in finding a party at the Dapha river to cross us, for I felt inwardly certain that we could not ford it at this date. We were now well to the west of the foot of Dapha Bum, 15,020 feet, on which a lot of fresh snow had fallen, and the Dapha river had surely to appear now or never. It did, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. It was a torrent as ugly as its reputation led us to believe, and not a sign of a human anywhere. It seemed the end had now come, for we were even then feeling the pinch of hunger. Not a crumb of anything remained."

* * * * *

The party trudged along for a further 2½ miles, making for a spot where a Chinese military survey party, operating west of the Chaukan, were reported to have crossed the river in the previous cold weather. It was two miles from the so-called delta, and Millar's first-hand description of the place conveys much more of the reality of the occasion than my pen can. Of the delta he says :—

> "It looked impossible—we did not, in fact, give it more than a sickly glance and collected round a large boulder to rest while we despatched a Nung to investigate higher up He returned after an hour with the answer we feared, but on which seemed to hang our right to live To go up the gorges to find a crossing meant at least two days up and two days down the other side, at the end of which time we should almost certainly have expired. As we were gazing intently at the Nung coming down to signal the fateful result, Goal Miri shouted "look a man is being washed down the river"! As we all stood up and looked we saw a Nung out in the middle of the river, his head and shoulders showing and going down stream at an unpleasant pace He was not being washed down—he was crossing—and it was obvious his feet were on the bottom, but the current was taking him down at a run. This brave man saved our lives. He reached the other side and returned to face the ordeal back. That man will live in my memory for ever. He had achieved the seemingly impossible We formed a human chain and went in The water here was not fast, but just above and below us were ugly rapids getting near which meant certain destruction. We tied the diminished loads on the Nungs' heads to help them keep their feet, and together with measured shouts to maintain a maximum strength against the load of water, which was pushing us down towards the rapid, we reached the other side.
>
> We were unable to go further and camped where we clambered out of the water. We felt an extraordinary mental elation, at least I did, at having crossed this river after heavy rain 3 months after the last date it was thought to be fordable. This fear, which I had harboured all along of it proving our downfall, had turned out to be false and we had succeeded where others had failed. But what use a mental exultation when one's body through sheer exhaustion and hunger failed to respond ?"

Millar's diary carries the narrative forward over the last dark hours before their deliverance, and I cannot do better than quote his exact words :

> "That night we sat round and silently gazed at each other. It did not seem much use drying our clothes when things were as they were.
>
> The next morning we got up at dawn, hunger was now beginning to tell on us in earnest. Leyden had a high temperature also, and said he could not go on further. I was unsympathetic and even uncouth I am afraid. To what levels does one sink when disaster approaches. I insisted on going forward with Goal in a last dash for a village. That day Goal and I marched all day at a hard pace and eventually came down on to thick ekra jungle and a small river—the Debawng. It was only 4 o'clock but we had to wait for the others because they would not have known whether we had gone up stream or down. It was here on a bit of sand that we found a footprint, the first signs of man for 19 days over a journey of over 100 miles. The track was about 4 days old, just before the last fall of rain.
>
> The rest of the party arrived after about 3 hours It was then almost dark. Leyden was out, completely, and lay down on arrival.

We were in a pathetic plight, for the pangs of hunger of all were now acute. The Nungs sat round glaring at each other, thinking, I suppose, the end was in sight. Later on in the dark they made flares of grass and searched under the stones for crabs and insects, but even these were denied them

Sleep was impossible in the mental state we found ourselves. It was about full moon, and Goal and I took a torch that night and set out down the river to follow the footprints in the sand. We had not gone far when these tracks were joined by two others—there were now 3 men's tracks, but all about 4 days old. Having satisfied ourselves that these tracks went down to the Dehing river we returned and made our plans for the morrow. Leyden at first refused to go further, for the simple reason that he could not. His feet were beyond walking, and he was running a high temperature. I do not personally think he had ever quite recovered from the terrible fall on his head crossing the Pakan river. With difficulty we persuaded him to be carried I intended to make a last dash for life before the strength to go on deserted us. We got up at 3 o'clock and made a stretcher to carry Leyden We left at 4 o'clock on a waning moon, and Goal and I set off ahead with the intention of beating on until we came to a village. At least one of us might get through. We reached the Dehing river after difficult going at about 9 o'clock. We found two empty shacks. At that moment two planes flew over fairly low. We burnt one house which blazed furiously in the strong wind which was blowing down the gorge—the 'planes crossed over each other but carried on. Things were desperate. I remarked to Goal that we should have to tie two dry logs together and take our chance in the river. It would wash us down to civilization quicker than we could ever hope to walk. We were now physically in a bad way. Goal pointed to two rapids which poured down on each side of an island of the river—there were probably other rapids all the way down at intervals. The problem was here solved in quite another way. Walking down towards the rapids I noticed a white cut mark in a tree ahead ; it was new. We went on and round a bulge found a small shack. As we walked up to it, remarking on the tree cut, nothing emerged, but on poking my head in I found to my delight 3 Mishmis, huddled up and obviously very frightened. It appears they had seen us burn the house below as a smoke signal and thought this must be some sort of punitive expedition. They had damped their fire down also. Over the fire was a pile of dried fish. We bowed politely and fell on it, keeping my eyes on their knives with a fatherly interest at the same time. The truth is we were ravenous. . . . . That morning they had intended returning to their village from their fishing excursion to the Dehing.

To cut a long story short we made great friends—not by words but by signs. A pact was also made. In exchange for my .450 rifle, which had stood us in such good stead once before, they promised to lead us to the nearest village which was none other than Bishi, another 2 days march.

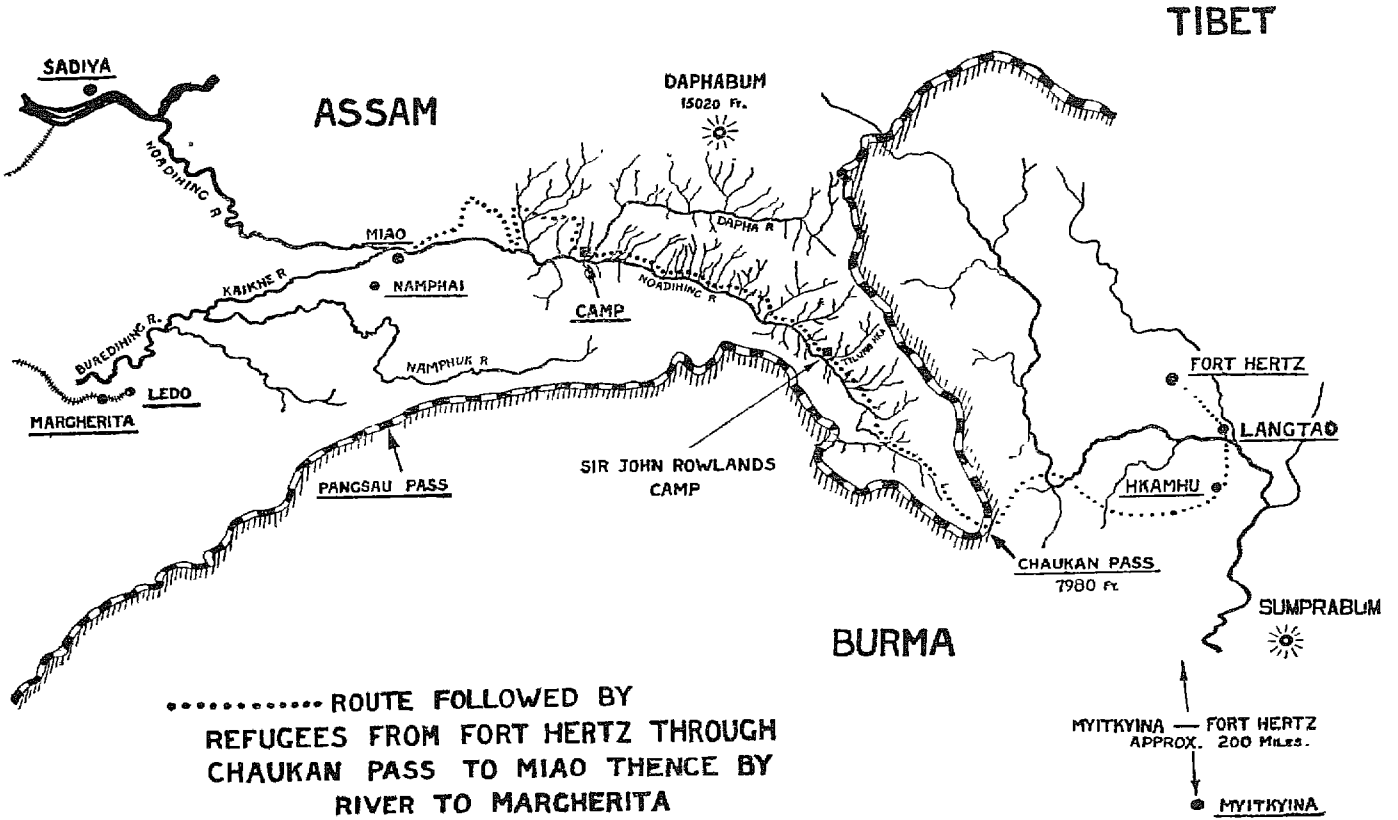
John Leyden and the others arrived an hour or two later. What a joy—our party whole intact and saved—except for little Misa. Who would have dared to hope for even life itself a few hours before, when starvation stared us in the face and our one hope had been that oblivion might be rapid. Had we been a few hours later, no Mishmis ; and what then ?

The dried fish kept us going that day and the whole of the next. We made slow progress, as Leyden had to be carried and we all kept together in our joie de vie. We eventually arrived at Bishi on the evening of the 3rd June, 24 days from Putao. There we found a Government Rice Dump and took full advantage of it.

The next day, the 4th, we arrived at Simon Camp, where Masson gave us a great welcome. Here fortune again came to the rescue. I heard that Gyles Mackrell with 84 elephants was at Namgai Camp only

5 miles away. I sent a man through with a letter to him at once. Mackrell arrived at about 9 o'clock. We told our story, and at once made plans for a rescue party to leave the following morning to go back towards the Chaukan and try to save those behind us

I had intended from the start to go back myself when we reached help, but to this Mackrell and Leyden would not agree, and in the light of my condition they were probably right. However, I knew that if anyone would succeed, Mackrell would, and my relief at his presence there that night cannot be adequately expressed. As per plan he left the following morning early for Namgoi, where he was to collect 20 selected elephants, as many villagers as possible, and proceed to the Dapha river. As one of our party was required to show Mackrell the way we had come, my brave little tracker Goal Miri volunteered to accompany the rescue party back, in spite of the fact that his condition was none too good Leyden and I said goodbye to Mackrell on the 5th morning, and left for Margherita "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LEDO
MARGHERITA
FORT HERTZ
LANGTAO
PANGSAU PASS
SIR JOHN ROWLANDS
CAMP
HKAMHU
CHAUKAN PASS
7980 Ft
SUMPRABUM
BURMA
MYITKYINA — FORT HERTZ
APPROX. 200 MILES.
MYITKYINA
ROUTE FOLLOWED BY
REFUGEES FROM FORT HERTZ THROUGH
CHAUKAN PASS TO MIAO THENCE BY
RIVER TO MARCHERITA

CHAPTER XI.

MACKRELL'S EXPEDITION

GYLES Mackrell, D.F.C., G M., who at this point enters the story of the Chaukan rescue is a director of a Calcutta Agency House who has many years of experience of tea garden inspection work. For many years he had made a special study of jungle conditions. Many of his holidays had been spent on shikar in the north-eastern border tracts of India, and in this way he had acquired long, continuous and probably unique experience of the kind of country to which Chaukan evacuees found themselves committed. For some time past he had kept a team of his own elephants, and I think I am correct in saying that during a long record of big game shooting he had disposed of no less than thirty rogue elephants His knowledge of the jungle derived from the hard experience of small one-man adventures, rather than highly organised expeditions run by large parties. He was thus admirably equipped to lead rescue operations from the Assam side. Mackrell volunteered originally for any kind of duty which he might be assigned in the Hukawng Valley relief operations, and for this purpose had reported at Ledo in mid-May. At that time the authorities in India were hoping that their warnings would have proved effective, and that in consequence no organised evacuation *via* the Chaukan would have got under way. On May 17th Mackrell set out from Ledo for Simon as an I.T.A. Liaison Officer with what is described in the records as "4½ elephants." On arrival at Simon he found Bathgate, a Burma businessman, in charge of elephant transport carrying food and stores over the Yangman Hills to Abors, who were portering it to Nampong on the main Pangsau route. Bathgate was assisted by Burgh of the Assam Railways and Trading Company, and between them they had a well organised depot. But unfortunately Bathgate could only speak Burmese and was unable to talk to the Assamese mahouts, whilst Burgh's services were urgently required for his own work at Margherita. As soon, therefore, as it was discovered that Mackrell not only had a wide knowledge of elephants but could talk Assamese to the men, Bathgate and Burgh handed over to him and left for base. The elephants increased to some 100 animals, and it was while he was in charge of these that he received on the evening of June 4th, an S.O.S. from Millar, whom he had known previously, asking him to come

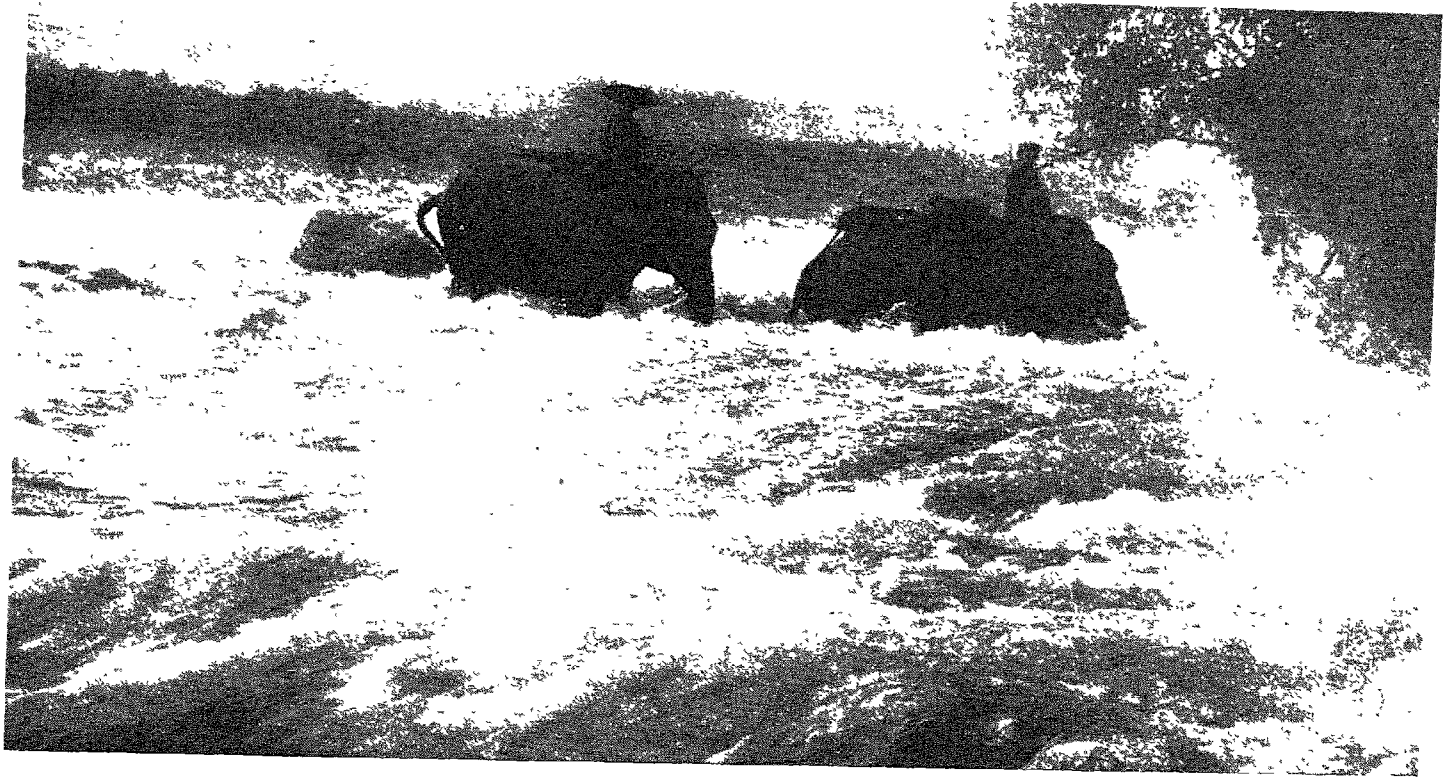
to Simon that night if possible. Mackrell reached there by seven in the evening, and learnt enough from Millar and Leyden, by then both very weak and ill, to realise that a large number of Europeans and Indians were stranded on the Chaukan with little hope of survival, unless a rescue expedition was organised with the utmost speed. The two men were far too exhausted to take a hand themselves, but Millar's Miri boy Goal agreed to guide Mackrell. Mackrell studied Millar's notes and his rough map of the route, and undertook to do his best in circumstances that looked distinctly unpromising. The river was rising rapidly, and Leyden had emphasised that Mackrell should have at least 20 elephants as, if any party at all was left to rescue, it would probably be a big one. Mackrell quickly collected what supplies he could at Namgoi, reaching Miao on the late afternoon of Saturday, June 6th He contacted the headman of the village, one Mat Ley, but as the inhabitants were in the middle of a funeral ceremony nothing could be done that night. More importantly, by that time the Dehing was almost, but note quite, uncrossable.

Neither Millar nor Leyden had seen this part of the route under full monsoon conditions They had got over by June 2nd, when the rivers were running comparatively low; and, in any case, neither in their then state, could have been expected to have really thought out the route from the point of view of utilising elephant transport. Mackrell's crossing of the Dehing was the first of the many outstanding achievements of the expedition. In the past he had regularly forded the fearsome Toorsa River in flood, but by comparison with the Dehing in the rains, the former was a mere trickle Early on the morning of Sunday June 7th the elephants were loaded, and a good long time was spent in finding a place to attempt a crossing. The river was very high, and the party was unsuccessful at several points. Four elephants failed altogether, and were washed away, but fortunately landed again on the same bank. Mackrell took off their loads and tried to swim them over, but ultimately had to give it up. Finally, after four hours' endeavour, the mahout Gohain got over on a big tusker, 16 others following, and a start was made for the Dapha. There were well defined tracks made by wild elephants carrying no loads, but invariably these had to be cut overhead for long distances. Goal, Millar's boy and the present guide, was able to keep the party headed in the right directions, but as he had previously covered the ground on foot, following a route which wound up and down over the hills, he was unaware of a number of short cuts that might be made by utilising the elephants for crossing the river at favourable points. As speed was of the very essence of the undertaking, Mackrell decided by

The Dapha River, the biggest tributary of the Noa Dihing or Diyun River. After the end of May this river is uncrossable without elephants

A smoke signal on the left fails to attract a plane flying high Leyden standing in the foreground with porters

In the later stages of the trek Leyden had to be carried in an improvised stretcher



Mackrell's elephants crossing the Dapha near the junction with the Noa Dihing The bottom of the river consisted of shifting boulders

the Sunday night to lose no further time following Millar's foot route. That evening he had contacted some Mishmis* who gave him a few fish. One of their number, described in Mackrell's diary as " a really splendid man ", undertook to guide the party on to Dabaum and the Dapha. His fee was modestly fixed at ten rupees and a little opium, and very early start was made on the morning of the 8th. At the beginning it was fairly easy going and on foot simple, except for the leeches In his own notes Mackrell speaks of this first stage of the journey as " wonderful . . . . up and down cliffs, along great plateau, down again to rivel level and finally to a point on the Dabaum river where Millar and Leyden had camped ". They also passed the remains of three camps, a relic of the Chinese cold weather reconnaissance. Dabaum was reached in the early afternoon, when the Mishmi guide and the mahouts wanted to make a protracted halt; Dabaum village, food, opium and a rest were beckoning; but Mackrell insisted on pushing on, and a further ten rupees and a seat on an elephant induced a more co-operative frame of kind in the Mishmi guide, who none the less insisted that they could not make the Dapha that night. Nevertheless, Mackrell felt that every hour counted and that they push on as far as possible. At 4 p.m. they ran into the middle of a very large herd of wild elephant, about 60 of them. Mackrell records the incident and the rest of a needle day and night in the following words:

> " They were on all sides and some kept coming quite close. At one time we managed unfortunately to get between a cow and her calf and I was afraid I might have to shoot, but it did not prove necessary. While we were still having trouble with this herd, a plane came over, evidently flying low although we could not see it. The trees in this area are anything up to 150 feet or more. It is really huge timber. Our own elephants did not seem to mind the plane, but the wild ones were very upset and made a great noise. All this time it was pouring rain and the elephants

* The Mishmis are the natural inhabitants of this sparsely populated area. They are a small hill tribe divided into four main groups, said to be endogamous. Headmen, of whom Mackrell had some experience, are chosen by heredity and further qualified by wealth and personality The tribe use arrows poisoned with aconite, and the chief commercial activity of this primitive community is the acquisition of musk which they extract from deer to be found in the country lying north of the Brahmaputra and towards the slopes of the Chaukan Pass. The Mishmis are expert hunters, and their musk ranks second only to the Chinese and Tibetan varieties which are most valued by the connoiseur. The musk is secreted in a gland of the musk deer, which is a shy nocturnal animal whose encompassment calls for considerable skill on the part of the hunter. The Mishmis are thus possessed of special local knowledge, which was subsequently to prove of considerable help to Mackrell in his rescue operations. They are fond of opium, of which Mackrell used to issue a small ration, each portion being handed out on top of a silver rupee. As Mackrell did not ask for the rupee back, the Mishmis were quite satisfied in their own minds that they had got that little extra which endears any transaction to humans at all stages of development, and particularly those whose social organisation is at an elementary level.

were slipping and sliding down slopes of red clay soil and scrambling up the other side, loads were constantly shifting as all were overloaded and the pads merely haulage pads and not suitable for big loads. Bush and bamboos met overhead and had to be cut away to allow the loads to pass under. By 8 p m. when it was almost dark we had not reached a place where we could possibly camp. The whole ground was swarming with leeches and there was no water for our number of elephants. The only level place we came to was a salt lick with wild elephant tracks and bison tracks everywhere, and more leeches than ever if that were possible When it became actually dark we lit what few hurricane lanterns we had and carried on with the grass-cut walking in front, or rather climbing in front, of their elephants and the leading mahout using my torch. Gohain, Apana and I walked behind the Mishmi guide and stopped every 15 minutes to take off the leeches which usually numbered 40 to 50 in that time. . . . At long last, 11 p m. just as the mahouts were on the verge of mutiny, and small blame to them, we reached a small stream that offered sufficient water for the elephants, and there we decided to camp It was still raining and leeches were still in great numbers so we could not make ourselves very comfortable, but rigged up a few tarpaulins and got a primus going. After some hot tea with rum in it I rolled myself in a ground sheet and went to sleep, after thanking all concerned for the splendid way they had carried on. The Mishmi warmed up his opium on my primus and the mahouts cooked a meal."

The following day, Tuesday, June 9th, was to witness the first of Mackrell's actual operations So uncomfortable had the previous night been that he had little difficulty in getting his party on the move in the morning. One elephant, upset by the wild herd the previous afternoon was missing, but so far that was the only casualty. Camp was struck at 6 a.m. and almost immediately the going became heavy and treacherous. There had been four inches of rain in the previous twenty-four hours, and the elephants were slipping dangerously. Here it may be mentioned that Mackrell's operations, as was the case with all the others, were dominated throughout by the necessity of synchronising porterage and stores in sufficient quantities. Later on he was constantly dogged by a situation in which if he had plentiful rations he usually had no porterage, or inadequate porterage. If he was fortunate enough to have transport in plenty he had insufficient rations, sometimes not even enough to support his own porter force in the field. Thus the loss of even one elephant could only be regarded as a serious matter, and on this particular day there were incidents enough to test everyone's nerve. At one point a middle elephant slipped its pad and load, and whilst it was being cut away and reloaded the rest had to be held dead still, as one false step would have sent them hurtling down several hundred feet of *kud*.* At last, however, after cutting their way steadily all day, they heard the roar of the Dapha below them, and a further hour's journey brought them to a swamp near the

* Kud = cliff side

river edge. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and they headed for the confluence of the Dapha and the Diyaun, passing the remains of another of Millar's shelters. A little further on they suddenly saw smoke coming from a point which they calculated must be about mid-river. The wild-elephant track which they were following was about five hundred yards in from the river bank, and Mackrell at once cut a way through to investigate. His own record of what followed is a much more poignant account of the scene which followed than anything I can write. Here is what he says:

> "On reaching the bank on a big tusker I discovered a number of men on an island surrounded by high and very fierce water, the channel between us being only about 60 yards across. They turned out later to be men of the Burma Rifles, Lashio Batn. and Burma Frontier Force with a few Burma P.W.D and porters. They signalled wildly and made signs to show they were starving I made several attempts there to get over, but it was utterly impossible as the river was flowing at a really terrific rate, being swollen with snow water and rain combined and the force of the water had washed all the shingle out, leaving no binding between the boulders, which were loose and moving on the bottom. The thunder of the river made speech impossible. From their side these unfortunates had pushed out a tree trunk, the only one on their island, as far as it would go and had weighted the end with rock so that it would stick up in the air and not touch the water and be carried away. But it failed to reach even a quarter of the way. We collected another with the elephants, and got it opposite and part way across and tried to join the two by cane, but when the Gurkhas removed their rocks and tried to push their tree a little further towards ours, it slipped and both were swept away at once. Until dark we tried over and over again, up and down the river, but failed to get an elephant anywhere near them, and the Kampti mahouts took terrible risks of being washed away and broken to pieces in trying to get over. At last at dark we were forced to give up, and I shall never forget the line of dejected figures crawling and stumbling back to their meagre grass shelters They had been so full of relief and hope when they saw us first, and had been on the island without food for 7 days, with that raging torrent making it smaller each day as its sides were eaten away. During the night I rigged up a light fishing line, the first to be cast from my 15 ft. masheer rod, attached to light rope which in turn was attached to some of the elephant tethering rope to which we intended to tie bundles of food in tarpaulin. At midnight I gave up watching the river and turned in, but at 2 a.m. a different tune in the roar of the water brought me wide awake and I found the level falling By 4 a.m. it was down by 3 to 4 feet and was free of the giant logs and drift that had been such a terror to the elephants before. One can imagine no greater contrast than that which the Dapha in flood offers to the Dapha running calm. Under the latter conditions it is a delightful hill stream, translucent green and singing merrily. In flood a raging terror. Few, if any, had ever seen the Dapha in the monsoon before."

Such is Mackrell's own realistic account of his meeting with the first party of refugees for whose rescue he was directly responsible. The dark hours of Tuesday-Wednesday, the 9th-10th June, made up an anxious night for both rescuer and rescued; but as is recorded above the river level had dropped substantially

by the early morning, and once they realised the improvement in the water the mahouts were up and busy, without waiting for a meal. Rungdot, a Kampti elephant which a month earlier had taken Mackrell over the Nampuk in full flood when the suspension bridge had been swept away, was selected for the first attempt He was in charge of a splendid little mahout, and by 5-30 a.m. was about a mile above the camp at a point where the river splits into several channels. By 7 a.m. the mahout was back in camp with the first three refugees. For this he was given a special reward of one hundred rupees, which was not offered to induce him to make the attempt, as was subsequently stated in a B.B.C broadcast. He went because he realised it was his duty to try to save the people on the island, and not because of the prospect of a reward, which was in nobody's mind when he made the first rescues. Thereafter, the others were brought in, a few at a time, until by mid-day the whole 68 had been taken off the island into the safety of the camp on the river bank. They yet had to face the longer and still dangerous trek back from the Dapha to Miao and they were ill and weak. But the worst of their many ordeals was over. Good luck rather than good management, together with Mackrell's over powering sense of the urgency of the occasion, combined in the words of Milton to "assert eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men." Whether an author, writing after the event, is justified in describing Mackrell's camp in this inhospitable no-man's jungle as " Paradise Regained " may be open to question. But that it represented something of the kind to these almost lost souls, I have no doubt. All but one of the 68 eventually got through to Simon, whence they went by boat to Margherita. So emaciated with hunger was the one who failed to make the rest of the journey, that it was estimated he could not have weighed more than five stone when Mackrell lifted him off the elephant which brought him over from the island. He died on the next stage, and was buried at Dabaum.

Within two hours of the last elephant and man leaving the island, the snow water began to come down again and in a very short time the whole of the island on which these men had been trapped for seven days was swept by a raging torrent in which no human being could have survived. Troubles of a different kind began after the actual rescue from the island. All the rescued party were starving, and had to be fed from a quite inadequate supply of rations and cooking utensils. The rain was coming down in solid sheets, and cooking operations had to be carried out on a damp fire which with great difficulty was kept going by Apana, Mackrell's personal servant for more than 30 years.

He sat for hours in the pouring rain, holding the camp's only umbrella over the fire and was soaked to the skin, in consequence of which he developed severe bronchitis and a high temperature which caused some anxiety until it responded to Mackrell's drastic but unprofessional treatment. Tea was brewed in a kerosene-tin, and issued with a little sugar and tinned milk. One cream cracker per man was handed out, and later a little rice was given to the refugees to cook for themselves. Mackrell had not hitherto had to deal with starving men, and within an hour he had two or three cases of colic on his hands through injudicious eating of raw rice. There was the further problem of dressing the terrible sores and wounds which most of them carried. At that time Mackrell had only a small medicine box, capable of serving normal purposes, but not nearly enough for 68 refugees in bad shape and his own 40 men, who were beginning to develop septic sores from leach bites and cuts. However, by judicious use of disinfectants and ungents, they were patched up sufficiently to begin the 70 mile trek they still had to make to Simon. Mackrell sent ten elephants back for supplies, and twenty of the worst refugee cases were provided with a lift, the whole party trailing off into the jungle just before nightfall. Two remained with Mackrell, one Bringet Rai of the Burma Frontier Force with a Bren gun he had carried all the way over the Chaukan from Burma. Considering that he was starving for most of the journey, this was a not inconsiderable physical feat and example of devotion to duty. On the morning of June 11th the river was down again in the absence of snow water, and Mackrell crossed to the further back with such rations as he could spare and made a small dump, as the rescued party had told him there was a European trying to get through behind them.

* * * *

Rain continued throughout Friday the 12th, but Saturday June 13th gave the expedition its first opportunity of attending to domestic affairs. It was a really hot dry day and everything in camp was opened up and sunned, to the immese relief of men who had lived and slept in soaking clothes since June 8th. Mackrell's diary for this day says: "It was grand to get some washing done and get some dry clothes , saw three large buffaloes." The Mishmi guide who had been sent back to see if he could recruit up to 20 more of his fellows returned with 15, who said they were prepared to go as far as possible up the Diyun Valley to bring in anyone requiring aid, but they expressed themselves as

being doubtful of getting as far as Sir John Rowland's party in the Chaukan. They agreed to carry 20 lbs. of European stores per head in addition to Indian stores and their own food, and in due course were transported over the river by elephants, carrying two fishing nets to supplement their own rations. A further word may here by interposed on the subject of supplies. On Sunday the 14th Mackrell crossed the river with Millar's boy and did a reconnaisance along the Dehing. Millar had come along at river level, but all signs of his track had now disappeared under water. The immediate problem was to find suitable places for food (when it arrived). In any case, everything had to be placed in trees out of reach of wild elephants, and protected from the almost constant rain. But a more unpredictable hazard was the fact that, if the river dropped, refugees would travel on the low level, whilst if it was still up they would come through anywhere. Two dumps were made that day, but Mackrell had not resolved final procedure when he returned to camp.

In the afternoon he again went down to the river, and suddenly sighted a lone figure on the far bank. This man turned out to be the forerunner of a party of 27 Sikhs who were all found and rescued and brought across by elephant. Fifteen of their comrades had died on the journey, and those who got as far as the Dapha were in the same starving condition as the earlier party and were fed with biscuits and rice, limited new supplies having been brought by Chachauli. They had failed to locate the two food dumps. A this time Mackrell was beginning to worry a good deal as to what was going on behind him, and what arrangements were being made to supply him in the big way that was necessary. His diary at this point reads: "We must have medical supplies as mine are almost out, and more food . . . . only a very little rice, no sugar, dhal or salt . . . . there seems little or no game except a few deer in thick grass on the river banks where I can't get to them. The men brought in say there is a party of 20 European a few days back, but they are not sure if they are pushing on or are going to wait for help. In any case I must stay in case they come through. I am sending off the Mishmis tomorrow with all they can carry and that we can possibly spare." The question of supplies was to be a constant anxiety, and as I have said the problem was always to equate porterage and stores in manageable quantities. Though it was something like three weeks on foot, Mackrell's camp on the Dapha was only two hours flying from Dinjan in Assam; but it was not until some time later when Lindsay, a connection of the then Viceroy's, got through that food dropping by air was begun. Anticipating somewhat, I may here say that the air dropping was

good, but the selection of things sent was dreadfully unimaginative. Mackrell slowly got his Dapha camp organised and could have well taken more cooked food, fruit and reading matter. Even a month old daily newspaper would have been welcome. As it was, for a long time, the only reading matter in the camp was a copy of *Men Only* which was read, and re-read, from cover to cover. (Certainly a little suitable reading matter dropped on them might have helped the relations of the Rowland and Rossiter parties still far behind). Air-dropping was not without its tragi-comic side. A bag of toys intended for the children in Shinviwyang was dropped on the Dapha camp by mistake. The spectacle of Mackrell's havildar gaunt, ill and fever stricken dragging a teddy bear back to his shelter is not likely to be forgotten by those who saw it.

By Monday June 15th five days had elapsed since the first lot of refugees and Mackrell's elephants had left the Dapha camp. The failure of the latter to return, and the total absence of news, was somewhat disconcerting. The following day, Chauchali made an attempt to see whether he could get elephants up or over the Diyun. After some hours he was obliged to report failure, as the bottom of the river was too loose and, where it had settled, too deep. However, just as he was returning to camp a party of 38 Gurkhas and Sikhs arrived at the confluence of the two rivers. There were brought into camp and reported that the Rowland and Rossiter parties were trying to come through, and were not "staying put" as had at first been supposed.

Over one hundred Indians had been rescued by Mackrell at the Dapha camp by the evening of Tuesday June 16th. The following morning a further small party of Gurkhas, Nepalis and Garwalis were brought in. The situation on that day is well summarised in a note sent back by runner to the Indian Tea Association's Chief Liaison Officer. It reads:

DAPHA CAMP
17th June 1942.

"This tin contains a long report to Hodson. It would have been easy just to say we heard people were likely to be here and we came and got them, but it would have been unfair to the mahouts and elephants to minimise the difficulties. The report can wait. The important points are these.

1. I have no information as to whether adequate medical and other arrangements for sending on refugees have been made at Miao. I told Millar I would have some arrangement behind me.

2. I found three lots of people actually dying of starvation 67, 27, and 6. The 68 have gone on to Miao on the 10th, less 2 kept here and one died

3. I am trying to get the less ill of the 33 off to day to Miao. What will they find there? Has anything been done? Are they to go to Simon or Namgoi? To-day is the 17th. I contacted Millar on the 4th and have had no word.

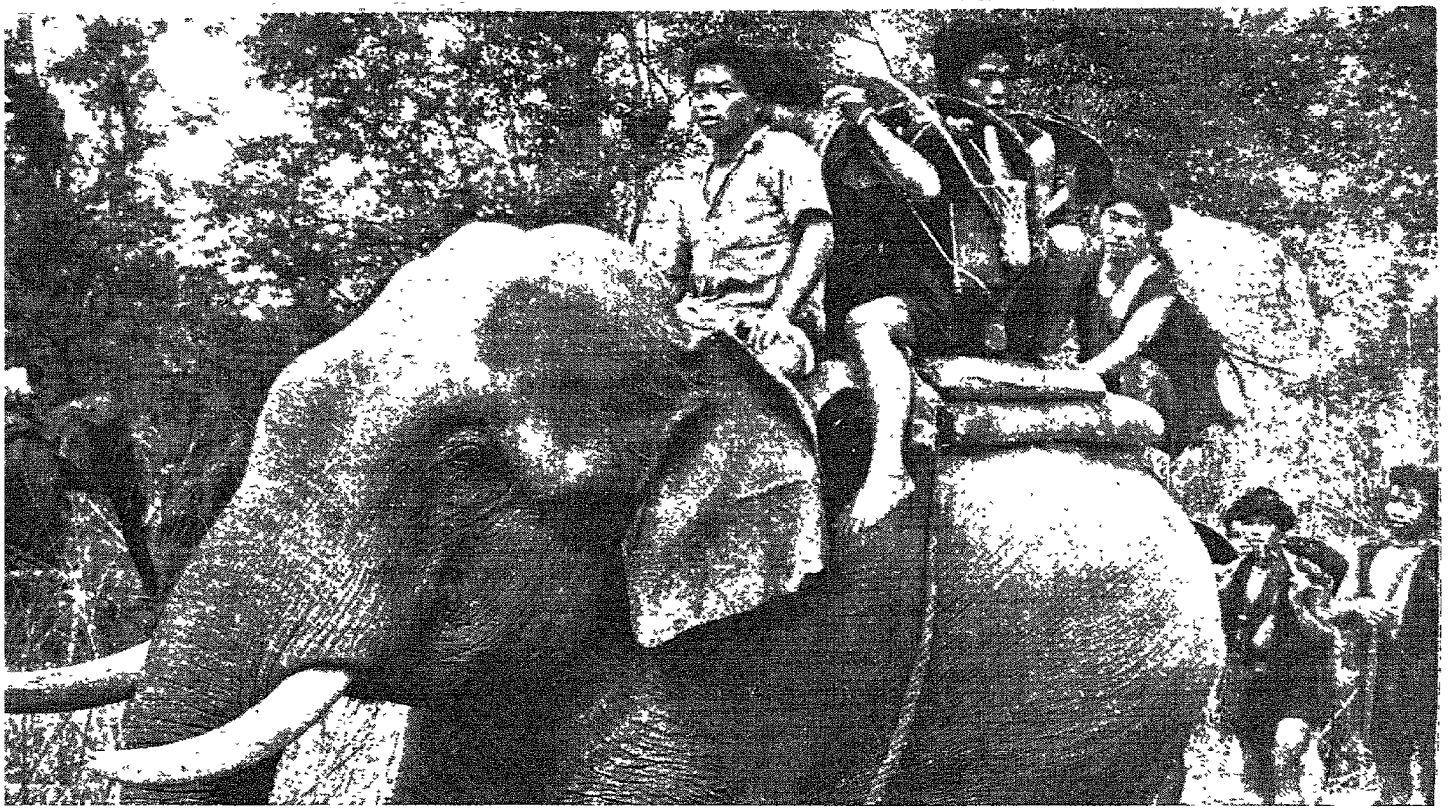
4. I *must* have medical help. I have a man dying here, and I have to dress and see to all of them. Nearly 75 per cent have had to have such medical attention as I can give them out of my small store of medical things. I have nothing but rice to give them, no mustard oil, no sugar, tea, ghur, atta.

I came here as fast as I could on the 9th, after seeing Millar on the night of the 4th. Had I been a day later 68 people would have died. But I did forced marches and am short of supplies, and from what I had I have fed 150 people, and my own men have been drawing rations since the 6th.

5. *I have* 16 *Mishmis in the hills on their way to* rescue a sahib who is said to be coming down without food. They will get to the Chaukan *if possible*, but they do not expect to be able to. I have given them letters and shall wait here till they return—3 week?

GYLES MACKRELL.

One can imagine no greater contrast than that which the Dapha in flood offers to the Dapha running calm . . . Few if any had seen the Dapha in the monsoon before



Rungdot, the famous elephant mentioned in the B B C broadcast of February 13th, 1943 as being the first across to the rescue of the party on the island. Rungdot is here seen carrying a party of Mishmis with food for refugees coming through the Dihing Valley in June 1942.

Near the scene of the island rescue

Some of the Europeans who came through the Chaukan This group includes Jardine, Fraser, Howe, Boyl, Pratt Ritchie Gardiner, Kendall and McCrindle together with three Indian servants in the foreground Fraser and Pratt had been prisoners in Jap hands

CHAPTER XII.

GRIM CAVALCADE

AT this point it will probably help to keep the broad picture of the Chaukan evacuation in focuss if we now look beyond the immediate banks of the Dapha to the bleak and unknown mountain country, where the Rowland and Rossiter parties were either halted or, at best, making slow and painful progress towards India. It will be recalled that Leyden and Millar left the principal Chaukan party under Sir John Rowland on May 17th, to make the dash which was the signal for relief operations to begin from the Assam side. At that time the rank and file of Sir John Rowland's party were making very heavy going. After Leyden and Millar had departed, the Rowland party proceeded a further eight miles, when they were obliged to halt for four days, whilst coolies went back two stages to bring up rice and stores, which had been left behind when mules and elephants could go no further. Two steps forward and one step back may be regarded as typical of the rate of progress at that stage of the journey. On May 22nd they went forward again, and during a day's march of about 10 miles had to wade across the Hpaungma River on no less than 37 occasions. By May 23rd they had reached the Namyak River when they were joined by Capt. Boyt, three other British officers and an N.C.O. who had made rapid progress on foot from Sumprabum. Two days later they moved up the Namyak River towards the Chaukan Pass, reaching the Pass on May 27th. Here a good camp was built with the assistance of coolies before the later finally left, having previously made it clear that they would proceed no further than the Chaukan. On the basis of a wireless message reported to have been received in Sumprabum from India, which purported to promise that the evacuees would be met at the Chaukan on May 27th, there seems to have been almost hourly expectation of the arrival of a relief party. In addition to the camp made at this spot, the jungle was cleared and large bonfires were burnt in the hopes of attracting the attention of passing 'planes, which were probably China National Airways craft, plying between India and Kumming. They were certainly not looking for refugees, nor could the latter get the smoke to rise to a sufficient height to attract their attention. By May 31st it was reluctantly decided that the promised help from India was not forthcoming,

and that the only thing to do was to push forward with as little delay as possible. But the fact was that without porterage, the larger and slower parties were almost, if not quite, immobilised. The reader should also understand that by this time the main Rowland and Rossiter caravans—if I may use the term—consisting mainly of Burma-China railway construction personnel and Burma district officials, were caught up by several smaller parties of evacuees, who would remain with them a day or two and then go ahead. These were largely composed of British officers and other ranks British and India, who at that stage of the journey at least were able to move fairly quickly, because they were together and more accustomed to the hard conditions of the jungle. They come fully into the narrative as the rescue operations proceed at the Dapha end, and I cannot trace the fortunes of each of the smaller parties in detail. Indeed, there would be a danger of losing the main thread of the story were I to attempt to do so. There was an obvious economy of time, effort and resources in small parties going ahead, as and when they felt able. Thus, for instance, Mr. Jardine, whom I have quoted in an earlier chapter, along with Lt. McGrindle, 2nd Lt. Howe, Capt. Fraser, Sergt. Pratt and Corporal Sawyer, decided there was no object in staying longer with the main party, as they were only consuming rations without making any headway on their own behalf, or on behalf of the rest. They felt able to carry sufficient food and kit to get to civilisation, from which relief could still be organised if the Millar-Leyden dash across the Pass had failed. Accordingly, they set off on their own on the morning of June 1st, another small party consisting of Captains Boyt and Gardiner, and Mr. Moses having made a similar decision two days earlier.

It was calculated that the main parties had about two months food supplies, and that they might with reasonable assurance establish themselves on the Pass and await the arrival of the assistance which would surely come as the result of one of the small expeditions reaching India in safety. This was the situation on the last day of May, but that night 45 Gurkhas arrived from Fort Hertz under an Indian N.C.O. Rattan Singh. They said they would be willing to carry small loads, and thus enable the Rowland and Rossiter parties to go forward. In consequence, camp was struck at the Chaukan on the morning of June 2nd and the whole grim cavalcade moved forward again. Thereafter, came ten days of the most violent monsoon weather. Unceasing heavy rain morning, noon and night, made marching progress painfully slow across swollen rivers, the winding jungle track being rendered slippery and treacherous by streams of mud and water. Not without reason, the Gurkhas began to complain. They had not

bargained for the slow pace at which the parties were moving which, with the limited quantities of rations available, they considered were endangering their own chances of reaching safety.

After consultation with the heads of all parties Sir John Rowland decided to call a halt at Tilung Hka (which was anyhow in full flood) with Mr. Rossiter's party on June 11th, eke out the dwindling food supplies for as long as possible and that yet another small party should be formed to push forward as quickly as possible for help. This latter consisted of Major Lindsay, Captain Cumming and Mr. Kendal, and it was decided that they should go forward as rapidly as possible with the Gurkhas, contact the nearest aerodrome in Assam to get food and medical supplies sent to the Tilung Hka before the stocks there completely ran out and the two main parties died of starvation Actually, the R.A.F. located the Tilung Hka camp on June 30th and the first consignment of foods was dropped on July 1st, thus removing the danger of starvation, which was more than a groundless fear because in order to lighten the loads, and increase the daily march, a good deal of food had already been abandoned. Jardine who was halted with his colleagues at the Tilung Hka waiting for the river to fall when the Rowland and Rossiter parties arrived, calculates that the latter had sufficient rations to keep them for about a further fortnight. From the food point of view, therefore, the position was very nearly critical by the time the first air-dropped supplies arrived in the camp. Heavy going had taken its toll of all, and particularly the weaker evacuees making their way from the Chaukan down the right bank of the Dehing. There was no recognisable track whatsoever, and in many places they were not able to walk along the side of the river owing to its being in flood. As long as it was not more than waist deep they were usually able to wade for long stretches, which was regarded as preferable to hacking a track through very thick jungle.

* * * *

On the morning of June 12th the Tilung Hka subsided somewhat, and it was resolved that the smaller parties (Jardine, McGrindle, Howe, Lindsay, Cumming, the Gurkhas, etc.), should make an endeavour to get across. The operation, successful in the end, was not accompanied without casualties. Corporal Sawyer was carried away by the swollen waters and drowned, whilst Captain Fraser was trapped under a log in mid-stream. The frantic efforts of his companions, who cut off his equipment, effected his rescue. These two incidents caused a serious loss and a measurable diminution of supplies for Jardine's party, who lost everything which was being carried by these two men. It

took them a further nine days march to reach the confluence of the Dapha and Dehing rivers where they were met by Mackrell In a note written after the journey Mr. Jardine says: "had it not been for this camp, which was put out by Mr. Mackrell, we should most certainly have died, as by the time we reached him we had only 4 ounces each of semi-putrified rice left and had been existing for the past seven days on nothing but 2 ounces of rice per day, without salt or anything else whatever. We found that Major Lindsay and Captain Cummings had arrived there only the day before, and that they had gone on by elephant to Margherita to give news of the plight in which the Rossiter and Rowlands parties had been left." Jardine also remarks that all the Indian troops who had previously got through would have perished of starvation had it not been for Mackrell's camp on the Dapha, for by the time they got there their food was completely exhausted and the expectations of replenishing themselves at Kamku, a large Dapha village shown on the map, would have been doomed to disappointment for Kamku had long previously ceases to exist. From Dapha to Miao took five days, and the party again had a narrow escape from drowning when their elephants were carried away whilst crossing a tributary of the Dehing. By now Jardine's party included Kendal, who was very ill indeed and died two days after reaching Margherita. During the last ten days of the journey Jardine himself was running a temperature of 103° as a result of an injury to his elbow caused by a serious fall *en route*. Jardine's note speaks highly of the morale of his little band, and he pays a warm tribute to its leader Captain Noel Boyt of whom he says: "he kept the party together; never allowed anyone to become despondent and displayed all the finest qualities of a leader and Christian gentleman." In greater or less degree, the vicissitudes of Jardine and his companions were representative of the experiences of the other small parties.

Meanwhile, the two main parties were well and truly bogged down at the Tilung Hka at which they had halted on June 11th. Food dropping from the air had, as we have already seen, begun on July 1st, and to that extent the situation was relieved, though living conditions continued to be primitive in the extreme and always very near the line of bare survival. On the 18th and 19th of July the Tilung Hka camp was surprised by the arrival of some 74 other refugees, mostly sick, from Burma. Of this number 50 were sepoys belonging to the Burma Rifles and Burma Frontier Force, whilst the rest mainly consisted of Burma Corporation workmen. The sick were treated as best they could be in the circumstances, and as 28 men were sufficiently well to carry rations and kit by July 23rd, Sir John Rowland himself decided

to go forward with another party this time numbering 72 men in all, who included Mr. Milne and other railway personnel. The number capable of carrying loads of even moderate weight was small, and in the circumstances it was impossible to move the whole Tilung Hka camp. Twenty-five people were therefore left behind, amongst them being Mr. Manley, Dr. Burgess Barnett, Captain Whitehouse, Mr. and Mrs Rossiter and their baby, six servants and twelve sick sepoys. In the course of an urgent S.O.S. written from the Tilung Hka camp at the end of August, a month after the Rowland party had gone, Manley refers to 60 sepoys and others who "insisted on leaving." He added "many of these were not fit and we fear may have caused considerable delay to the relief party . . . ." The sepoys remaining with him he said were mostly sick, and he was finding it difficult to prevent them leaving also. "If only we could have some idea when to expect the rescue party it would be easier to hold them." Manley points out that thirty or forty per cent of the air-dropped supplies were being lost by falling in the Tilung Hka or in other ways, and much tinned food burst on falling. On the whole the health of the party had improved since air-dropping began, but with only four items of diet—rice, atta, tea and salt—in adequate supply he felt that this would not last, and milk was being carefully husbanded for the Rossiter child. In reference to other things, his letter says: "our clothes and blankets are wearing out, nights are getting cold and our power of resistance to fever and illness will decrease."

But to return to Sir John Rowland and his party. They trekked forward for five days from July 23rd, and on July 28th made the confluence of the Dapha and the Dehing in the early hours of the morning. They were met by Captain Street and soon afterwards reached the Dapha camp, now occupied by Assam Rifles who by that time had been brought into the rescue operations. They rested at the Dapha until the morning of August 2nd, when they left for Margherita, which they reached on the afternoon of August 7th. That ended a journey of 452 miles from Myitkyina in Burma to Margherita in Assam. Most of it had been done on foot, and in conditions of almost indescribable difficulty they had traversed some of the most formidable country in the world, at least a part of which had never previously been visited by man. Where all displayed courage and endurance of a high order, it is perhaps invidious to mention individual names. I may, however, be permitted to add as a postscript to this part of the story that I believe that, at the time the journey was made, Sir John Rowland himself was some 60 years of age.

* * * *

It is necessary now to turn back to the camp on the Dapha, where we had left Mackrell in mid-June with more than a hundred rescued refugees to his credit. On June 17th he had sent a despatch by runner to the Chief Liaison Officer of the Indian Tea Association. In the midst of that day's rescue operations, Captain Wilson arrived on the scene. He had left Margherita after Millar and Leyden had arrived there on June 7th, to bring forward the much-needed supplies, previously mentioned. His arrival explained the failure of the elephants to return to Dapha after they had taken back the first batch of refugees. Wilson had met the elephants on their return journey and had sent them for tarpaulins, etc., which in ignorance of the desperate food situation at the Dapha Camp, he considered of first importance This was not an unnatural mistake since, up to then, no contact had been possible with Mackrell. There was a considerable difference between the 'political' porters brought in by Wilson and the volunteer party under Mackrell, the former insisting on their rights to rest at regular intervals and to receive full rations. In a diary entry at this time Mackrell says somewhat wearily: "I wish I could rest my men." The arrival of Captain Wilson once again raised the ever recurring question of the relationship of supplies to portrage. He brought with him some 60 men, but the loads of food they carried were little more than enough for the whole party now at the Dapha, and provided a very questionable margin with which to ration any large party that might be organised to go forward to bring in the Tilung Hka refugees. By the time air dropping had begun at the end of June, and supplies for a forward party were being built up, Wilson's luck was out, for all but a few of his porters had absconded or were ill. The Mishmis had also got a high proportion of sickness, the stout hearted head Mishmi having contracted the dysentery from which he eventually died. An effective forward move by Wilson thus became out of the question, in spite of the fact that the camp held more food than ever before as a result of air-dropping. But I am digressing.

Wilson brought with him a Dr. Bardoloi, of whose work the records speak in terms of high praise. During the next two days a few more Gurkhas and Sikhs were collected, but defections amongst the porters had begun. On Saturday June 20th, Captain Cummings was found, whilst Lindsay and Kendall were located a little later at a sand-spur just above the junction of the two rivers. Mackrell notes "Lindsay has a terrible leg—big abscess from a bruise—and Kendall looks desperately ill." Lindsay insisted on pushing straight on to Delhi, Mackrell describing his whole bearing as "a grand effort." The next afternoon

Jardine and a few others came in, with Boyt close on their heels.

Captain Wilson was now participating in the reconnaissance and supply operations, which were going on day and night across and up the opposite bank of the Dapha. Of those known to be approaching Mackrell's camp at this date a Garwali was lost. On Monday June 22nd the river was rising steadily and it was impossible to make a crossing. Boyt, Ritchie, Gardiner, Fraser, Jardine, McGrindle, Howe, Kendall and Pratt were now in the camp waiting to move on. Pratt was a sergeant in a Hussar regiment and, with Captain Fraser, had been taken prisoner by the Japs. They managed to escape and had later joined the Chaukan evacuation.

By June 23rd the river was rising ominously, and was bearing straight down on Mackrell and the refugees. A tree trunk jambing anywhere might deflect the whole angry torrent on to the camp, so it was decided to select a new site. The following day Mackrell and Wilson did a reconnaissance upriver, and found a place that seemed suitable. What happened after took the shape of a somewhat jerky retreat from the river to safer quarters All were beginning to feel the strain—including Mackrell, who, apart from his prolonged physical exertions had to do the thinking for those who were no longer able to think for themselves, and maintain constant vigilance over a situation that was extremely fluid in more senses than one. His diary for June 24th records that :

> "Wilson went ahead to prepare camp on the 25th morning and in the evening I went up and as the river was rising and the matter was urgent, I stayed to get the camp ready and asked Capt. Wilson to go back to bring the others up. The river rose still further and the return to me would have been so difficult that they determined to stay. Most of the food was with me and all the bedding was with them, and an attempt to adjust this failed as the Mishmis were cut off and spent the night up the side of the hill. During the night I developed high fever as the result of having no dry clothes, which brought it out. I was better when Wilson and the others reached my camp and by the aid of aspirin and quinine have been able to keep going, some days quite fit but find it difficult to concentrate."

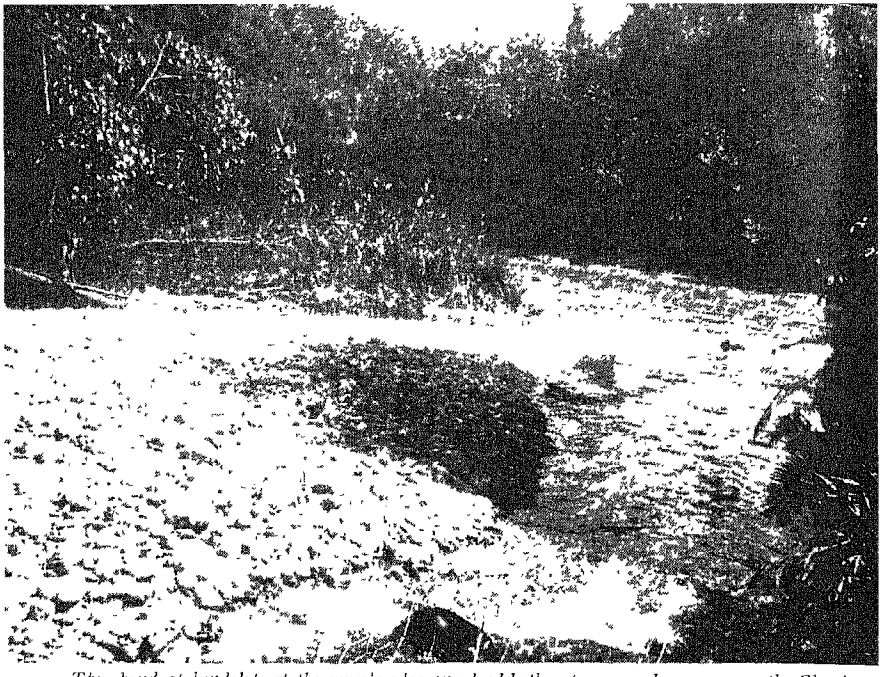
For more than a week Mackrell was very much hors de combat. His temperature was subject to considerable fluctuations, but Wilson noted that he registered some improvement on July 2nd. However, it was not till later that he was able to resume his daily progress report. By that time a change of strategy had become necessary. A small but useful help-force had been established on the far side of the river to help Chaukan refugees over a longer stretch into the Dapha camp. In his notes for

June 29th Wilson gives a rough picture of the condition of the Dapha camp and the disposition of its man-power.

> "Raining again, we have on the other side 2 Assam Rifles, 16 porters, 8 Mishmis—alright yet for rations—but stuff is not coming in from Miao Capt. Boyt, 3 other B.O's, Mackrell and I are down to brass tacks on rations, not short but the incidentals are not here. Sugar, flour or ata, cigarettes, tobacco (a little native) etc. Hope someone wakes up at the back and sends some stuff along. Elephants seem to go all over the place once they leave Mackrell's immediate control—and they are supposed to be rushing here with rations. The mahouts are a putrid crowd It's a puzzle to me that Mackrell had managed them so far—but he has But how we need a man at Miao who will help some. If the Dabaum goes up we will be in queer street here for food, and of course no air support. A lovely dropping place here where we are camped now about 1½ miles up the Dapha just in front of where we cut into the jungle—rest after 6 a.m. Am going with the elephants to try again. Later, midday, did not manage to get over. Tried all over the place to do so but there is a bit more water than yesterday—saw the Mishmis and they followed along the far bank having managed to do the first bit on the cliff top. A military patrol came in only 2. Havildar and 1 rifle sick at Dabaum. They will have to go back tomorrow morning—rations are not plentiful. They brought some mail with them. Also word that Chauchali is on his way—with 2 elephants, but that he had lost one, and was searching for it. Mackrell not well.
>
> The amount of rations, both Indian and European we have been able to get up here, both with porters and elephants have just been sufficient to keep us and the arriving refugees fed.

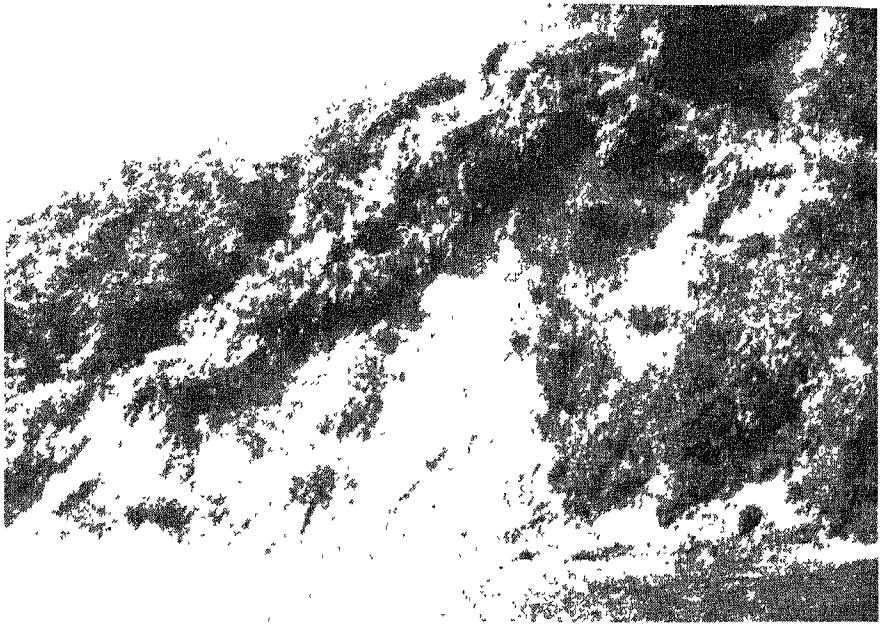
On June 30th Eadon and Moses, a boy, a rifleman and five porters were brought in The camp's meagre rations were being supplemented by fish from the Mishmis, who proved themselves excellent fishermen, and on this day and the next a fair quantity of stores were dropped from the air. So accurate was the aiming on this occasion that two heavy bags fell dangerously near to Mackrell who was lying fever ridden in his tent. Medical stores, however, continued to be in very short supply, and Boyt and his party who went off on three elephants on July 1st were instructed to make urgent representations for more medicines etc., as, soon as they reached civilisation. Moses and Eadon were sent on by elephant on July 2nd, and Wilson notes "we have no bandage or cotton wool left, so will have to patch their legs up with torn blanket or something." The vagaries of air-dropping are illustrated by the fact that one bag dropped at this time contained a block and a rope, but the block broke on impact, though the rope later proved to be useful. Meanwhile, stores were being steadily crossed to the far side of the river and food dumps created upstream, with the Mishmis clearing a rough track along the bank as far as they could go. Operations were influenced from day to day by the weather conditions and the height of the river, which was frequently unfordable for twentyfour or fortyeight hours at a time. But, in spite of set-backs Mackrell's life line

Some of the Indian soldiers who had been stranded on the island in the Dapha seen after their rescue on June 10th, 1942. On the right is Bringet Rai of the Lashio Battn., B.F.F. who had carried a gun over the Chaukan Pass. He is seen holding it in the picture.



This kind of landslip at the river's edge involved both refugees and rescuers on the Chaukan in long detours into the jungle

A typical tributary of the main waterway. Such a stream sometimes had to be crossed a dozen times a day



This kind of perilous crossing of a mountain torrent sometimes had to be undertaken several times a day. The foothold consists of a single tree trunk

Boats brought all the way from Loobah in Sylhet had to be dragged up parts of the Dihing. They played an important part in the final rescue operations

was being steadily lengthened and so pushed forward and upstream. The man-power situation however, was rapidly deteriorating. There was much genuine sickness, and the progressive worsening of the weather caused a good deal of restlessness amongst both the Mishmis and the porters. "Thou hast the keys of paradise, oh! just, subtle and mighty opium", wrote De Quiney; but the keys of paradise were acquiring a sharply rising scarcity value in the Dapha camp. It had been Mackrell's practice to hand out a little opium on a silver rupee, but such gifts were now forthcoming at greatly lengthening intervals, with a consequent drop in human happiness if not necessarily in morals. July 5th was an exciting day, and the following quotation from Wilson's record describes a brief but eventful communication with the outside world:

> "Raining steadily. If the planes have not yet contacted the Rossiter party, I am afraid it is too late to do anything now for them by track, Lack of a message from the air is incomprehensible here. We should know whether they have got air supplies or not. On the 28th, the Havildar had not contacted them 5/7 days from here—on the 10th (Boyt) they had only just enough to exist on—without using energy, for 14 days. So it looks pretty bad by track. Now their 14 days is 11 days over! The plane that went over on the 3rd, Chaukan way—then came back here 45 minutes later and dropped over 100 bags—rather points to the fact that they hadn't been able to drop it there. Something wrong—. Porters here are still hobbling about, except for 2. They go sick, some or most genuine. Others probably not, and it is only by absolutely driving them, that one can even get a few odd camp duties done. Later. *A message! ! !* At last. The plane came along and after dropping stores, I saw a bag with a tape on it. The Chaukan party have been fed 30th June, and early July. Had we contacted them with any of our people? Mackrell answered no. Could we help them with the labour at our disposal here—No.
>
> Should they send 30 more porters taking 15 days to get up? Yes. Do we think it possible for us to get them out during the rains—or will they feed them from the air and let them come out when the rains close?— We will try and get them out. Also Black is coming to Miao with 2 elephants. 12 more are coming up from Doom Dooma. Mackrell answered the queries as above—it looks as though Major Lindsay has been busy! The plane came back in the afternoon, dropped more stuff, and a message saying they were going over to see if they could see the Chaukan crowd, if they could, they would give a green verey on return. They did."

On July 6th both Mackrell, who was now in better health, and Wilson reconnoitred the further or left bank of the river, which for some distance was sheer cliff, and came to the conclusion that there was no suitable way up for elephants. In consequence, they decided to place a food store at the bottom and a camp at the top of the cliff which would be manned by Wilson, Mackrell remaining in the camp on the right bank. These tasks, which were designed to carry a rough track forward to the Tilung

Hka, kept Wilson busy until July 10th when Col. Pizey, who had arrived at Mackrell's camp with Black from Miao, decided to recall him. Col. Pizey and Capt. Wilson accordingly took leave of Mackrell on the morning of July 11th.

Mackrell had been able to resume the writing of his diary on July 8th, on which date the Naga Sirdar porter, who had been sent forward towards the Chaukan on June 20th, returned with his party, one of whom had died. He had failed to reach the Pass, but had done a splendid job of work none-the-less. He and his men went on to Miao as they were in no fit condition to remain at the Dapha Camp, where Mackrell dolefully records that something of a lacuna had set in. A temporary break in the weather, resulting in a fine spell, found as I have already noted the number of effective porters reduced to three or four and the Mishmis giving notice of their intention to leave, as their head man had fallen sick. He had played his part nobly and Mackrell pays generous tribute to his guidance, without which he considers it was unlikely he would have reached the Dapha in time to rescue the first party of 68 from the island in mid-stream. On July 12th, two more porters who had been forward in a party under the command of another sirdar, Iman Singh, arrived bearing a letter from Sir John Rowland and Rossiter saying they could not move under less than 60 or 70 porters, that they were ill and debilitated and would remain where they were until help could be sent—which must be quickly. As I have already shown they later changed their plans, but I record the fact of this letter, because it forms an important link in the chain of events at the Dapha camp. Tami and Gunga Bahadur, the two porters in question, had left the Tilung Hka on July 4th and with little food had therefore taken 8 days coming through to Mackrell. The latter and Black at once took counsel together, and it was decided that Black should leave for Assam early the following morning with Sir John Rowland's letter to make sure there was no delay in its receipt. They rightly gauged that it was important that the authorities should have the position fully explained, and that the R.A.F. should be asked to drop more food. With a high incidence of sickness, depleted personnel and the prospect of even worse weather Mackrell was now reluctantly coming to the conclusion that relief for the remainder of the Chaukan victims would have to be re-organised on a stronger basis, with a refreshed striking force employed for the purpose. The three days after Black's departure were therefore occupied in getting ready to strike camp. On the afternoon of the July 12th a plane had come over and, on the assumption that it carried someone who already knew the lay-out of the Dapha camp, Mackrell set fire

to the now empty Mishmis huts and put out the ground signal "AM VACATING CAMP AND MOVING WEST". This message was unfortunately to lead to confusion at the base later on; for the plane actually mistook the camp, thinking it was Sir John Rowland and party at the Tilung Hka, an error for which Mackrell could hardly be held responsible. Two days later a suspicious looking plane, with strange markings, circled the camp four times and flew off eastward. It was probably a Jap machine, and those on the ground took cover in case of machine gunning.

Six elephants came in from Miao on July 15th and the machans on the far bank of the river were replenished, whilst such rations as could be usefully be kept were safely stocked in the camp, which by now was littered with hundreds of rotting bags. These attracted literally thousands of flies to add to the unpleasantness of a camp already infested with sand flies, house flies, leeches, dim-dams and mosquitoes. "No wonder", says Mackrell's diary "this area is uninhabited." When everything that was worth keeping had been protected and the rest of the gear loaded, camp was finally struck in the early hours of July 17th, Mackrell, porters, mahouts and 17 elephants heading for Dabaum which they reached at 5 p.m. in the evening. There the weary party—triumphant, yet disappointed—were met by the faithful Mishmi guide looking desperately ill. Mackrell paid him in full, adding a further one hundred rupees as a reward for all he had done. Pay chits were handed to his companions for encashment at Miao, which the main convoy reached on Sunday the 19th. Here they were met by Capt. Webster and Street*, the former accompanied by a party of Assam Rifles, Kachins and Garos, with orders to ask Mackrell to launch a fresh effort to reach Rossiter's party, as the R.A.F. reported the latter had burned their camp and were moving west. I have already explained the genesis of this unfortunate misunderstanding Mackrell quite correctly refused to entertain the idea that the Tilung Hka camp had burnt their shelters and put out an

* Street subsequently died, and after his death Webster, who was a Political Officer, left Dapha with his porters who had sustained a high proportion of casualties Black and seventeen Assam Rifles awaited Mackrell's return to make his second attempt. The porters who had been with Webster on an unsuccessful attempt to reach the Tilung Hka had been forced back by fever, severe leech bites and septic sores. Subsequently, on his way back to Dapha on August 21st, Mackrell met this party, and he reports that Webster gave it as his view, which he intended to confirm at the base, that the rescue of the party at the Tilung Hka was impossible until the coming cold weather. However, Mackrell, who had met relatives of one of the stranded men whilst in Shillong, was determined to keep his promise that by some means or another the Tilung Hka party would be extricated from its desperate predicament.

identical signal, at the same time as he did at the Dapha. The two camps had been confused, and in the absence of any verification of what he could only regard as a rumour he decided to go ahead with his original plan, which was to proceed to base and return to the Dapha after visiting Shillong and Calcutta to arrange boats, stores and necessary personnel. He arrived at Margherita at eight o'clock at night on July 21st, having travelled *via* Simon, from which place his first relief expedition, now at end, had been originally launched on June 4th. He and his companions had worked for six weeks and five days on one of the strangest missions of mercy in the long annals of human distress.

But the end was not yet.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE MORE RIVER

THOUGH he was returning temporarily to base, the Refugee Administrator (North) decided that Mackrell was still in charge of operations at the Dapha and sent word to this effect. This communication reached Mackrell only after he had passed Street and Webster between Miao and Simon; but he was able to send a runner back to apprise them of the Administrator's decision and to say that Street was to assume charge until his return. Lack of space and consideration for the sensibilities of the reader who by now has no doubt found the introduction, dispersal and disappearance of several characters from the story a little confusing, preclude me from going into details of Street and Webster's valuable and not unavailing activities in the period during which Mackrell was at base. Street's tragic and untimely death in the middle of August was a source of grief to all associated with the relief project. It was Street, Webster and their Assam Rifles who met Sir John Rowland and Party at the Dapha-Dehing confluence on July 31st, rested them for two days and set them on the last stage of their journey They were thus able to give help at a moment when it was very much needed indeed. It is, however, I think a not unfair criticism (if the word criticism can be used in reference to what was a selfless, high-minded and spirited venture) that Street, Webster and their sturdy little band of Rifles were not really equipped in resources or experience to do much more than hold the fort until Mackrell returned with the fresh force he judged necessary to get the rest of the Chaukan survivors to safety. It is easy to be wise after the event; but looking objectively, and after a long passage of time at this particular interlude, it seems clear that if Mackrell had for the moment cried quits to the Dapha, the monsoon and the vagaries of fortune a light-weight expedition could, at best, only hope to function as a care and maintenance party, tending to communications in and around the Dapha camp and keeping the stores in good order. To attempt anything more ambitious was to run the risk of dissipating valuable man-power and creating fresh, but avoidable, difficulties which might later divert some of the energy that was exclusively required for the urgent work of rescue. In giving this as my opinion, I hope I do no injustice to men to whom, so far as an author can, I take

off my hat But in reading all the documents that have been made available to me, and from the one brief talk I have had with Mackrell (with whom I was otherwise totally unacquainted) I have formed the opinion that it was his judicious mixture of speed and caution, his conception of concentrated striking power and leadership, his attention to detail and his highly developed sixth sense of what will "go" in the jungle and what will not, which brought the Chaukan rescue operations to their final successful conclusion. At some stage or another, either forward or at the base, almost everybody else made a miscalculation. Had it been otherwise they would have been less than human. But on the big issues, in spite of the fact that he spent long periods in the isolation of the Dapha area, let it be written that Mackrell's judgment was uniformly right. I believe he viewed the prospects of Street and Webster at the Dapha with not a little foreboding.

It was this impulse to particularise and measure the ascertainable facts that led Mackrell, as soon as he got back to base to make an air-survey of the Chaukan route. On July 23rd he and Dudley Hodson (I.T.A. Chief Liaison Officer) first flew over Shimbiwyang, Shamlung and Nampong on the Hukwang Valley route, where evacuation operations were still in full swing. They then made off to the Chaukan Pass, and at the Tilung Hka there was, of course, no sign whatever of the camp having been burnt or evacuated, as they saw people on the ground. Actually Sir John Rowland and his party had left that afternoon, but Rossiter and the rest were still in occupation. The plane returned *via* the Dapha Camp, where Street was seen to be bathing and someone else standing on the river bank. Elephants were still loaded and probably had just arrived. Mackrell tied a message to a tin of milk saying that the Tilung Hka Camp was still occupied. The message was received and for the rest of the flight Mackrell "studied the Dehing carefully from Dapha to Miao." One of the chief reasons for Mackrell wishing to carry out this aerial reconnaissance was that he had decided that, if the Tilung Hka party was to be reached and brought out in safety in the very middle of the monsoon, some boats were essential, provided that the banks of the Dehing offered foothold for expert boatmen who would have to manhandle their craft over the rapids on the upward journey. No boat had ever been above Miao gorge before, but Mackrell, after his flight over a great part of the river from Tilung Hka to Miao, decided that it could be done—and it was. With the co-operation of the military authorities, influenced by the fact that among those left behind at Tilung Hka was a woman with a baby, Mackrell's request for priority passage for three boats all the way from Bardapur in Cachar to

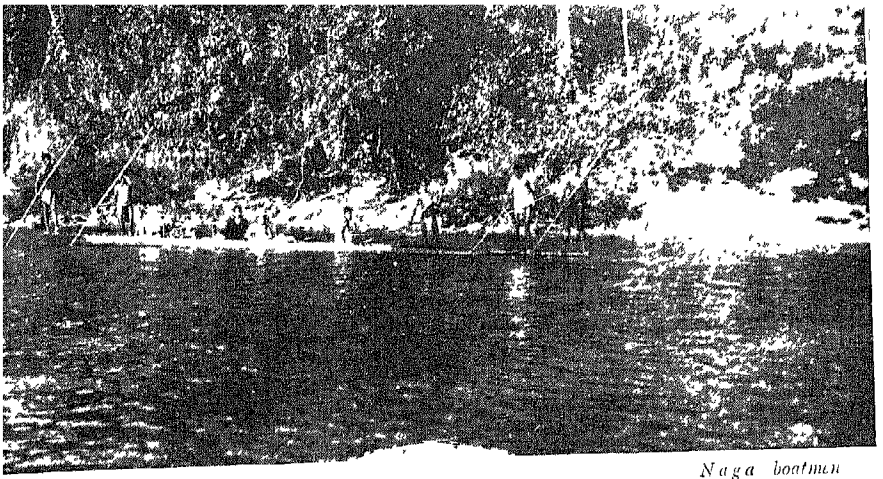
Margherita, with their crew of nine expert boatmen from the Loobah river, was acceded to and the boats went through in record time. They were eventually to prove the salvation of both the rescue party and the refugees, since at one point they were stranded with a landslide above, another below and the elephants unable to cross the river which had risen 19 feet. On that occasion the boats took them all across, and the elephants were swum over without their pads. One of the boats was lost in a whirlpool, but the other two finally conveyed the whole party from Miao to Margherita, a circumstance which is explained by the fact that in the prevailing pessimism as to the chances of success no supplies or boats had been left at Miao, and Mackrell had to find his own way back from a point at which help might have been expected.

* * * *

After the flight the next few days were spent in Shillong and Calcutta. At a small private lunch in Calcutta, Jardine presented Mackrell with a cigarette case from those members of Chaukan party who had so far reached India in safety but Mackrell's chief preoccupation was to organise stores and transport, the latter consisting of both boats and elepehants, for his next attempt to reach the unfortunates who were still left on the Pass. After a series of conferences with the heads of the Indian Tea Association and representatives of Government he was back in Margherita by the afternoon of August 6th. The following day Sir John Rowland, Lecky Thompson, Molloy and Milne arrived there with their party of Burma Rifles and he was able to glean much useful information from Them. After collecting food, medicines and other necessaries Mackrell journeyed by river to Simon which he reached at noon on Saturday August 15th. The journey was not without its excitements. Both boatmen and mahouts required a good deal of that kind of practical encouragement of which Mackrell was a master, and the weather was vile for most of the way. There was a halt for a day or two at Simon, where Lancaster was found to be suffering from an extremely painful ear abscess which sent him back to base. Lancaster's colleague Smith was fit, but it was here that the first news of Street's illness and death was received. Mackrell reached Miao on the evening of the 19th. Warner was waiting for him with a meal and a number of new Kampti elephants. On Friday August 21st he set out once more for the Dapha Camp, meeting Webster *en route* between Bishi and Paken. From Webster he ascertained that his attempt to reach the Rossiter party had failed through too

few rations having been taken forward. Black was still at the Dapha Camp, which Mackrell reached once more on the evening of Saturday August 22nd having journeyed *via* Dabaum, he learnt that his old comrade the Mishmi guide had died in the interval since he had paid him off a little over a month earlier. The following day, Sunday, was spent at the Dapha Camp and Mackrell decided to move over to the left bank of the river. Before he left for base with details of Street's death, Black confessed how disappointed he and Webster were that they had not been able to do the trick, and the finish the rescues before their effort finally spent itself By the Tuesday Mackrell was well established on the left bank, and the following day he began probing forward up the cliff side and towards the Dehing. A wild elephant was discovered grazing at the foot of the cliff, up which it had so far been impossible to find a track the pad elephants could use. Mackrell and his men formed a half circle behind this animal, and eventually forced it to take a route up the cliff. They were than able to improve this track sufficiently for all the elephants to be taken up to the camp 150 feet above, to which supplies had already been hauled by block and tackle, and were only waiting a means of forward transport.

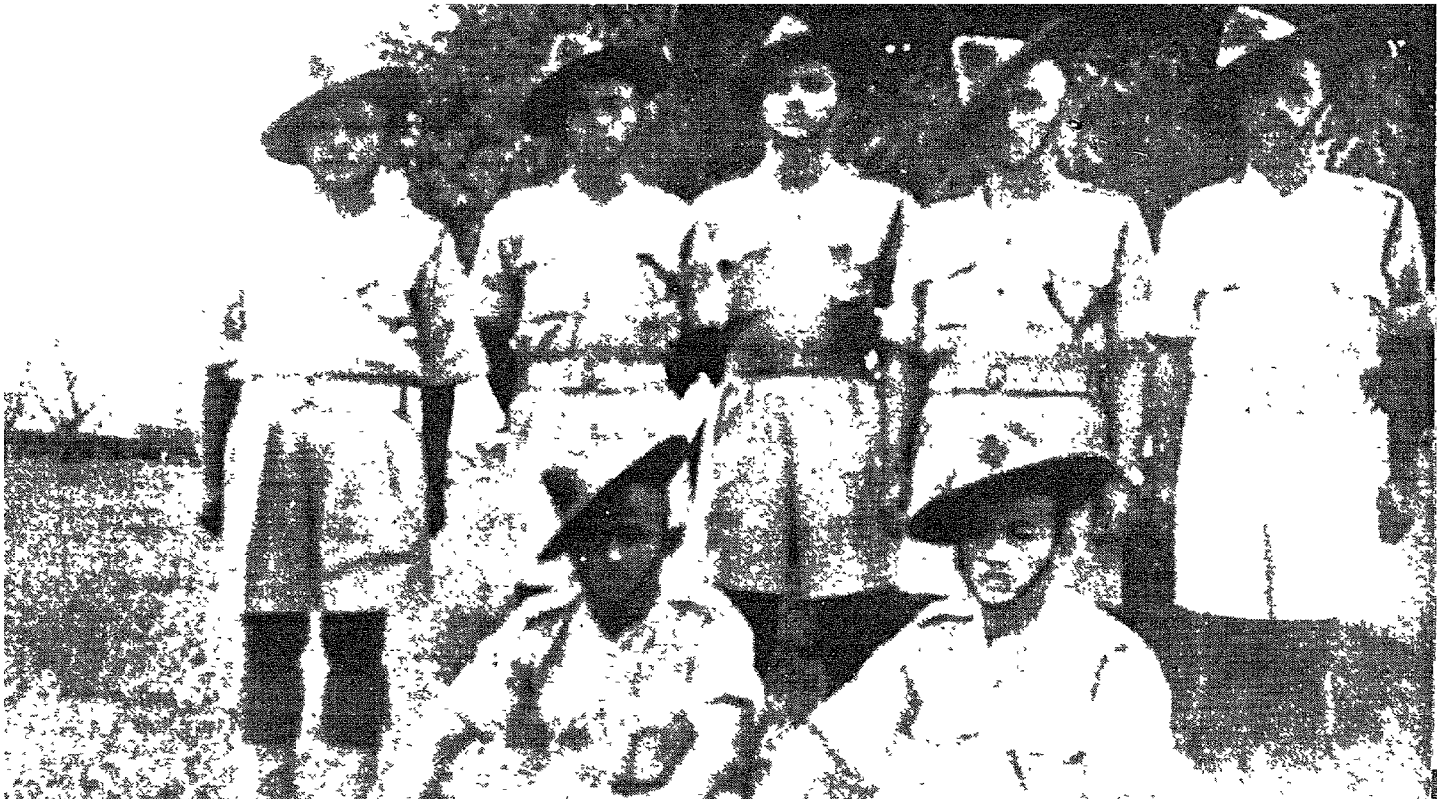
Here is a convenient point at which to say a word about the splendid men of the 2nd Assam Rifles who, with a few members of the Political Porter Corps, were indispensable to the final rescue of the Tilung Hka party. When Mackrell reached the Dapha at the end of August, some 25 men of the Assam Rifles and Political Porter Corps were there with Black. They had been instructed to report to Mackrell and waited to do so—but with the full intention of asking permission to withdraw, as they had already suffered severely in health in the course of the unsuccessful attempt with Webster. Mackrell, however, decided on a conference with Havildar Dharramsing at which he explained the starving condition of the unfortunates still at Tilung Hka, that it was increasingly difficult to supply this party by air and that he, at any rate, must remain at Dapha in case any of them were able to get that far. For it was unthinkable that they should do so, only to find no help awaiting them with the last big barrier still to cross. He pointed out to the Havildar that if they felt equal to one last attempt, he himself would try to take them as far forward as possible together with their equipment and supplies, by elephant. Once they reached a point from which further elephant transport would be impossible he would send them on alone as he considered the presence of an elderly European might be more handicap than help to these stalwart hillmen, once they were within striking distance of the Tilung Hka. Mackrell said he



Naga boatmen with Political Officer and Chief

Typical Singpho Boatmen

Singphos hauling boat past rapids



The party of the 2nd Battn., Assam Rifles who rendered Mackrell such splendid service They include from left to right Havildar Dharramsing, Naik Gyan Bahadur, Havildar Sanam Lama, Havildar Iman Sing and Naik Manickchand Rai, all recipients of the British Empire Medal

Here is the party which reached the refugees left at Tulung Hka. In the LEFT CENTRE *is Whitehouse, who was crippled from the waist down.* BELOW *is Dr. Burgess Barnett, who though fit enough to have trekked out earlier, stayed behind with the others. Manley is in the lower foreground whilst between him and Burgess Barnett is Tami, the little Aka porter, who carried Whitehouse on his back for a great part of the journey. Others in the picture are Havildar Dharmasingh (with rifle), Havildar Sanam Lama, Naik Gyan Bahadur and Lce-Naik Manickchand Rai, whose legs are bandaged as the result of septic leech bites. These men received the British Empire Medal.*

Support party of the Assam Rifles, together with porters, under the command of Havildar Dharamsingh, whose important role in the rescue operations is described in these pages

felt sure the rescue cold be accomplished if they would agree to try. He asked for an answer next morning. The next day the Havildar saluted with, as Mackrell puts it, "a face like wood, giving no indication of the fateful decision they had reached." "Sahib", he said, "we will all go with you" This was the beginning of a day of great good fortune, for shortly afterwards they found the wild elephant which showed them the way up the cliff—a discovery which solved the transport problem for the first five camps.

The reader will be able to assess the conditions under which the expedition was now moving, from the following extract from Mackrell's diary of Sunday August 30th :

> "As report received from the men who returned yesterday seemed to show that if someone was with them to take the responsibility, they might be able to take elephants down to the river level at camp 2, I went forward with 8 elephants and rations for a week and two days for myself as I did not intend to leave Dapha for long just then, in case news came through by air regarding the position of the Tilung party, which we presumed to be still in their camp Took 2 hoes, an exe, and a pick axe Cleared the track as much as possible as we went and arrived at the top of the very steep gradient down to the river at 2 p.m I went down the track on foot and found 4 places that were definitely dangerous for loaded elephants, in that they had to go too near a weak outer edge to get round the corners, with a drop of about 200 ft below Widened all these, cut away huge tree knots, made creeper ropes for anyone on foot and finally got all 8 elephants down by 5 p.m. Camped on river bank. During the night one elephant fully hobbled, strayed and went over a steep drop into the river. Had to send a big tusker across as no trace of it could be found on the right bank We discovered the elephant grazing placidly, quite uninjured although it had been carried down one rapid"

Finding the lost elephant cost some hours delay on the Monday morning, but when the party finally got moving it was to follow wild elephant tracks up and along a small stream to the top of a hill, from which Mackrell thought the Dehing valley was just visible. In this he was mistaken, though it took the rest of the day to establish the error. Eventually on Tuesday September 1st, the first day of a new month, they found a way down to the river which they crossed, camping for the night opposite Webster's Camp Two, which was located on a land-slide. The whole of the next day was spent in an unsuccessful search for a short cut up-river, which once more demonstrated that whatever expenditure of time and energy might be involved it was almost always better to stick to the winding river bank. By Thursday, September 3rd, Mackrell had cut forward along the left bank to a point opposite Camp Three, beyond which he built a large machan and rationed it with rice, salt, dhal and a few seers of sugar. By now Mackrell had a feeling that they were really hot on the right trail—a presentiment which was soon to be dra-

matically confirmed. On Friday he and Havildar Dharramsing did a long reconnaissance on foot, but failed to find a high level track and movement was once again restricted to water level.

* * * *

On Saturday September 4th it was Mackrell's intention to camp as far forward as he could get, and do a closer reconnaissance from that point. An early start was made and, to protect the men as much as possible from leech bites, as well as to keep an extra look out for anyone trying to get through, a few porters were put on to the opposite bank of the river. This extra precaution was amply rewarded later on in the morning. Mackrell's diary describes details of the occasion in the following passage :—

"At 11 a.m. one man came back to me and reported some people on the right bank, moving slowly down stream Went to investigate and found Rossiter and party of 14, including his wife and a baby We managed to cross them all They were mostly very weak, but had rations they had brought from Tiling plus a few tins from Camp 4. They had found the rice mouldy. They reported one Gurkha as left behind, stung badly about the eyes by wasps. He was coming behind them I therefore unloaded all the elephants at that point and sent all Rossiter's party off with their own kit and the porters back to our last camp. I asked Havildar Dharramsing and one porter to go forward and make a further attempt to find a way out of the upper part of the river, while I waited for the blinded man, whom I was afraid of missing if I left the spot. He came stumbling along the bank at 3 p m. but the elephants did not return until nearly 4 so I was unable to cross him over. Signed him to go to sleep which he did under a rock. As soon as the elephants returned I crossed over and gave him some tea and brought him across. We then reloaded the camp on to the elephants, and leaving one for Havildar Dharramsing we returned to the last camp to find Rossiter settled and having tea. Re-issued rations to everyone, built another camp for ourselves and had just finished this about dark when the elephants returned that I had sent off on the 1st Rossiter had just handed me a letter addressed to Pearce from Manley which I opened. He had a duplicate that I asked him very particularly to deliver to Tomson at Margherita since Pearce was not there . . . . . Manley's letter was an S O.S. for assistance and his post script even more so. I quote the latter here for reference :

'*P.S.* This was not sent on the day it was written because to have done so would led to a general exodus. The situation has now somewhat changed ; Mrs. Rossiter's pregnancy has determined her to leave with her husband, S.A.Ss, and servants The sepoys are also going, and we are unable to prevent them in spite of your order to 'stay put'

There remain here Manley, Burgess-Barnett, and Whitehouse with 4 servants. Whitehouse is suffering from peripheral neuritis affecting his legs and has been very ill. He will have to be carried most of the way.

Our food situation (as I have said in the body of the letter) is *very serious*, but it is more so now that we have had to give up much of it to the Rossiter party. We have beef and half rations, for 8 days and nothing else beyond salt, tea, rice and atta.

Do please do your utmost to deliver us from a situation which is becoming desperate. Signed : E. L Manley. 29-8-42.'"

Within a few moments of receiving this *cri de coeur*, Mackrell opened his own letters, brought forward from the Dapha Camp by incoming elephant. Included in the correspondence were two communications instructing him to call off any further attempt to rescue the Chaukan refugees, to return to base forthwith and to release all staff at the camps, other than certain special personnel at Miao. One of these letters was from the Political Officer at Margherita and was then many days old; the other was more recent, bearing the date September 3rd and had been dropped by plane at the Dapha Camp under instructions from the Refugee Administrator. The orders were of a peremptory character, but Mackrell quickly decided it was quite impossible to withdraw in the face of Manley's desperate call for help, a communication of which those behind him were obviously ignorant. Nor could they be expected to know that he had already got the Rossiter party "in the bag," as the popular saying goes. He accordingly gave written instructions to Rossiter, which were subsequently acknowledged by Warner at Miao, instructing all I.T.A. Liaison officers to withdraw, at the same time closing down the depots at Miao and Simon and thus, in fact, cutting his own life-line for the return journey. Reserve porters at the Dapha camp were instructed to leave for Miao. Rossiter's party, now accommodated on six elephants, left for Dapha the following day bearing these written orders, and as soon as they had gone Mackrell determined on a further thrust forward. Havildar Dharramsing, who throughout worked like a Trojan, reported that he had found what looked like a possible elephant track leading down to the Dehing, at a point well above Camp Four. By this route they eventually reached river level at four o'clock in the afternoon making a crossing at a very bad place, with huge boulders under the water, an hour and a half later. All the camp gear was crossed, but not all the men. The river was changing colour, an ominous sign, and it had risen three feet in about thirty minutes. In consequence Dharramsing and three of his men spent the night separated from the main party and without food or shelter. It was an uncomfortable predicament, but preferable to the tragedy that might well have overtaken them had they attempted to cross.

The following morning, September 7th, Mackrell decided on even more urgent action. Progress with the elephants was slow and it was certain that the position at Tilung Hka was getting daily more desperate. A striking party of nine was therefore enlisted to go forward on foot. The choice was left to the men themselves, and the final selection was Naik Gyanbahadur, in command, accompanied by compounder Havildar Sanam Lama,

L/ce Naik Manichand Rai and six "Political" porters—Gungabahadur, Tami, (two men who had been forward before) Santabir, Chintamani, Dilbahadur, Karnabahadur They carried some fresh onions, cigarettes, potatoes, sugar, butter, apple rings, milk, bully beef, soap, lysol, ointment, gentian violet and a Lilo air bed for Whitehouse. They were all fit and confident of success, fully realising the need for getting to Tilung as fast as they could reasonably travel. It was a matter of some regret to Mackrell that he could not put this party under the charge of Dharramsing, but this splendid Havildar had been getting recurring bouts of fever, and Mackrell had already mentally designated him for leadership of a support party he intended to send forward, after an interval, with rations for Camps 5 and 6 if it proved impossible to get elephants or boats any higher. Repeated attempts had failed to find a way forward on either bank, and for the time being they were camped on a V shaped point, at a place they named Tulwar. Some hours after Gyanbahadur's striking force had left, a plane passed over the camp flying low. Mackrell afterwards learnt that Brigadier Whitworth, mentioned in an earlier chapter, was in it. The next two days were spent in a further futile attempt to reconnoitre a track ahead that would be possible for elephants. Thursday September 10th was a red letter day, for three boats arrived, having taken nine days to get up from Dapha in the most difficult conditions. Mackrell describes it as "a splendid effort."

For the next two days Mackrell made an effort to progress towards Tilung Hka by boat. Three boats were loaded with 14 days rations, and on the first day the party dragged and carried the heavy craft over rocks in many places, and loaded and reloaded rations and kit in all seven times. Finally, after an exhausting twelve hours, they reached a camp site in a gorge about twenty feet above a large whirlpool, falling asleep for the night amongst the rocks. Starting again next morning, they came upon a whirlpool which proved quite unnegotiable, and Mackrell decided to turn back to the camp at Tulwar and waste no further time. From here he despatched his support party under Havildar Dharramsing with six men with rations for a week, and a further set of rations for nineteen people for one day each in Camps Five and Six. After depositing these supplies, Dharramsing's orders were to go forward improving the track to Camp Seven.

For Mackrell the next few days were a period of waiting and watching. By Monday September 14th Gyanbahadur's striking force had been away a week, and Mackrell calculated they should have been well on the way back and that the supporting force, under Dharramsing, should be in Camp 6 unless the track im-

provement had taken longer than he had originally estimated. During this vigil Mackrell was by no means idle, and the days and nights had their compensations. He had a fishing rod with him and he landed one or two big boka. For the first time he had opportunity to make a note about the surrounding flora. The following is an entry in his diary.

> "Number of big horn-bills whose tails seem longer than the plains variety keep going over. The small white flowers on the cliff opposite, resembling white primroses but with orchis stems, are fully out and among them a lot of red balsoms and some huge scarlet chlerodendrons, as well as some rhododendrons Saw a small black snake in my tent but although I turned out all my kit and looked in boots, pockets, etc., never got it. Large night-jar out in the evening Saw the first wagtails 9 days ago and a hopoe to-day, so it looks as though the cold weather is on the way. River looks clearer and at 6 p.m. saw a 3 day old moon which means we still have some days before we need expect trouble with the river. Party should be safe by then."

The following day, Wednesday September 16th:

> "Wild elephants round last night, but did not come into camp although everything was pitch dark Saw a fish move well out into the pool and with a long cast got over him and wondered what I had got into. I only have a light fly rod, and the fish took me right down the rapid then changed its mind and came back up again just in time to save my line Took me half an hour to get him out and turned out to be a big boka of 11 lbs. Still no news, so all must be well or very wrong, one cannot tell which. Heavy thunderstorm blowing up, which seems wrong with the moon where it is. Half moon should be about 20th."

As the days passed without news a little anxiety became a great anxiety. Ten days after Gyanbahadur's party had left there was still no news of them, but Mackrell noted after a forward inspection that the river level seemed to be steady, which he regarded as a good augury. He went along to Camp Five himself and improved some of the climbs. On Friday the 18th he decided to make another attempt with the boats, but it took the whole of the daylight hours to make three miles, and once again he had to come back. When he arrived in camp he found that Dharramsing and his men had returned after rationing camps five and six, but without contacting either Manley's party or Gyanbahadur's forward striking force. The latter had now been away twelve days. His diary for this day summarises the position as he now saw it:

> "Decided to rest the support party until the morning of the 20th, and then let them go forward again to try to help the forward party in. Dressed all sores, etc., and gave a rum issue. Dharramsing has done well. He carried on till his rations were getting low and has improved the track well on towards camp 7, and rationed camps 5 and 6. They only found a

few mouldy rations there. The position is now strong. We have the camps above and below us well stocked, and enough for a week in the camp here with us We may need it all when the rise comes—as it must soon I expect the carrying of Whitehouse is causing much delay, but as we have improved a good many miles of track, the last stages should be quicker and I expect them in by the 21st Kamptu Sirdar and Gohan came in with news that elephants had arrived with more rations Sent boatmen down to bring these

Another day went by, and then on September 20th Dharramsing's supporting party once more made an early start, to the accompaniment of rain and heavy cloud in the surrounding hills. At two o'clock on this memorable Sunday afternoon Mackrell knew that success had at last crowned the efforts of himself and his gallent men. Two porters came in with a note from Manley, saying that he and the last of the Tilung Hka party were not far off. The relief which this message brought with it can be better imagined than described. At 5 p.m., just as heavy rain set in, the Chaukan evacuees came in sight, weak, emaciated and worn, Whitehouse slung across the back of Tami " the splendid little Aka porter ". Nothing of the emotion of the occasion survives in the written records, but we must assume that it was a meeting which will continue to live in the memories of all who participated in it. Seeking for comparisons, one's mind automatically moves to the elation of the great historic moments of travel and exploration—Stanley and Livingstone, the heroism of Scott, the dour determination of Amundsen. But none of these seem quite applicable to the climax of this astonishing story of the finding of those who were lost—the rescue of the living from the valley of the shadow of death. The fact that they now knew that help was near at hand had not mitigated the last lap of the trek, in which Mackrell's Gurkha comrades played such a magnificent hand. For instance, these indomitable men between them carried Whitehouse, who by then was quite crippled from the waist downwards, on their backs for some forty miles up and down precipitous cliffs and landslides and across flooded streams running at a frightening pace. At one point, where the cliff was so steep, and foot and hand holds so precarious that it was no longer possible to carry him, five of the Gurkhas went over first and the remainder threw Whitehouse into the stream to be caught by the forward party as he was swept round the bend of the cliff.

It was in a spirit of profound thankfulness that they later gathered round the special meal which Mackrell prepared from them, from his carefully hoarded tinned provisions. By 8 p.m. all were fast asleep. During the night, and throughout the next day, the river rose rapidly. The whirlpool was flinging up large tree-trunks with a dangerous disregard for the camp, which Mack-

rell had to move to higher ground before a start was made for Dapha. Both Dr. Burgess-Barnett and Whitehouse had intermittent bouts of high fever, and Dharramsing and some of the men were running temperatures as well. I will not describe the journey back. It was no pic-nic. Rations were cut down to the lowest possible level, for Mackrell now had 26 mahouts, four extra men, 12 Rifles and porters, 4 Europeans, five servants, two Burma Rifles and 10 boatmen—63 in all—to feed. He wisely ordered periodical rest days, and the now historic Dapha Camp was not made till September 29th. Here Dr. Bardoli was waiting, practical and helpful as always. Margherita, that haven of refuge for so many weary souls from Burma, was reached on the afternoon of October 6th, four months after Millar had sent his first S.O.S. to Mackrell. There, for all practical purposes, this account of the epic of the Chaukan comes to an end. Mackrell received some very pleasant telegrams from a number of people in high places, and his diary ends with the following characteristic comment:

> "I close this diary with the statement that I have already made to everyone, that too much credit has been given to me, too little to Millar and Leyden, not nearly enough to the Rifles, Porters, Mahouts and that without the latter splendid fellows, and unless Millar and Leyden had got through in the first instance, little or nothing could have been done in time to save the bulk of this party"