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A CONCISE HISTORY OF:

11 ARMY GROUP (HISTORY & PERSONNEL)

A concise history of the 11th Army Group, an operational command of the British Army in 1943 and 1944, responsible for operations in South East Asia. In addition, known details of the key appointments held are included.

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11th Army Group

The 11th Army Group was formed on the 16th October 1943 at Delhi to command the land forces in Eastern India, Burma and Ceylon. The Headquarters were based initially at Delhi, and then moved to Barrackpore. It took command of the newly formed 14th Army and Ceylon Command.

During the winter of 1943 and early 1944, the 11th Army Group was tasked with seaborne operations in the Arakan. The first matter that 11th Army Group had to address was training and equipping of the army in order to regain Burma. At this period, this was no small undertaking. Much had to be done to improve the health and fitness of the 14th Army, sickness rates resulted in more casualties than occurred in combat situations.

Then, as XV Indian Corps launched a limited offensive in the Arakan, on the 4th February 1944 the Japanese struck in the Arakan. The 28th Army launched their offensive designed to draw in British reserves. On the 10th February, a counter attack by 26th Indian Division retook Taung Bazaar, but then the 7th Indian Infantry Division was surrounded. Previously, the British forces would have withdrawn, but this time they stayed out and fought it out. This was aided by the British now having air superiority. It was not until the 24th February that the 5th Indian Division relieved 7th Indian Division.

On the 7th March 1944, General GIFFARD approved the withdrawal of IV Corps units from Tamu and Tiddim and sent instructions to Lieutenant General SLIM at 14th Army stating:

- The impending Japanese offensive would probably be on a larger scale than anything they had yet attempted in Burma;
- The Allied lines of communication were parallel to the front and were a source of weakness;
- The Imphal plain was of immense strategic importance and its loss would be disastrous – Its security was therefore the primary task of IV Corps;

The plans for the deployment of a Long Range Penetration formation into Burma was ordered at the highest level. The 70th Infantry Division was incorporated into Special Force, and a West African brigade was added to make a total of six brigades. The 16th Infantry Brigade was concentrated at Ledo by the 27th January 1944 with orders to march into northern Burma and then attack Indaw. The first Column moved off on the 5th February. By the 20th March, this brigade had covered over four-hundred miles and reached a stronghold called 'Aberdeen'.

Meanwhile, the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade was flown into 'Broadway' on the 5th March. The build-up of forces continued over the next few days. The 111th Indian Infantry Brigade landed at 'Chowringhee' on the night of the 6th/7th March, with other units from the brigade landing at 'Broadway'.

A block was established just south of Henu and twenty miles north of Indaw on the 16th March, the location being known by the code-name 'White City'. The 23rd March saw the establishment of an air-strip at 'Aberdeen' to allow the fly-in of the 14th Infantry Brigade and 3rd (West African) Infantry Brigades. The following day saw the death of the commander of Special Force, Major General WINGATE just at a crucial stage of the operation. By the end of March, 'Broadway' was under attack from the Japanese, both from the air and on the ground.

The units from the 16th Infantry Brigade started their attack on Indaw overnight the 26th/27th March, but faced stubborn resistance. This led to the attack being called off and Columns rested at 'Aberdeen'. 'Aberdeen' was evacuated by the 29th April, but a new stronghold was formed at 'Blackpool'. 'White City' was evacuated on the 9th May 1944, and 'Broadway' was evacuated by the 13th May 1944. 'Blackpool' came under sustained attack from the Japanese, leading to that stronghold was evacuated on the 25th May and the British troops withdrew towards Indawgyi Lake.

On the 27th May, the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade was given orders to attack and capture Mogaung to support the operations of the Northern Area Combat Command. The final attack on the town commenced on the 23rd June, which was abandoned by the Japanese on the 26th June. This was a remarkable feat of arms by a depleted and exhausted Special Force brigade.

The units were flown out of northern Burma, and by the 1st August, only the 14th Infantry Brigade and 3rd (West African) Infantry Brigade were left in the area. By the middle of August, the 36th Indian Infantry Division had arrived at Myitkyina, and deployed southwards down the railway corridor. This allowed the West African brigade to be flown out by the 18th August, and the 14th Brigade followed by the 26th August.

On the 12th November 1944, its functions were taken over by H.Q. Allied Land Forces South East Asia, with replacement personnel in most posts.

General Officer Commanding-in-Chief – (G.O.C.-in-C.)

16th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

General Sir George James GIFFARD, K.C.B., D.S.O., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*¹

Major General – General Staff – (M.G.G.S.)

16th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

Major General Ian Stanley Ord PLAYFAIR, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.*

Major General in charge of Administration

16th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

Major General Eric GODDARD,

Deputy Quarter-Master-General – (D.A. & Q.M.G.)

16th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

Brigadier Francis James WALSH

Brigadier Royal Artillery – (B.R.A.)

16th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) William SWINTON, M.C.**

Chief Engineer – (C.Eng)

October 1943 – November 1944

Brigadier Harold Gustave Francis GREENWOOD, M.C.

Chief Signal Officer – (C.S.O.)

27th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

Brigadier (Temporary) John Frankland CHARLESWORTH, O.B.E.

Director of Supplies and Transport

R.I.A.S.C.

Brigadier P. A ARDEN

Director of Medical Services – (D.M.S.)

16th October 1943 – 12th November 1944

Major General Treffry Owen THOMPSON, C.B.E., D.M.

Consultant Surgeon

¹ Created G.C.B. on the 1st January 1944 (New Year's Honours List).

Consultant Physician

Deputy Director of Ordnance Services – (D.D.O.S.)

Deputy Director of Mechanical Engineering – (D.D.M.E.)

Command Paymaster

Assistant Director of Dental Services

Deputy Director of Labour

Command Education Officer

Command Welfare Officer

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