

Smash Railways, Bridges, Relieve Pressure in China in Epic Jungle Campaign

By PRESTON GROVER

A British Base on the Indo-Burma Frontier, May 20 (AP).— A super-raid by British* and Empire troops that for three months swept through Burma on a 300-mile front, wrecking railroads and bridges and generally harassing Japanese occupation forces, drew near its close today as the weary raiders, many of them disease-ridden, struggled out of the jungle.

(The operation was officially declared ended in a special communique issued early Friday morning in New Delhi.)

For three months this fighting force of Britons, Burmese, Indians and jungle tribesmen marched and counter-marched through the jungle, bobbing up everywhere from Mandalay northward to Myitkyin to pester the Japanese, while not a word of their exploits was allowed to reach the world.

(Reuters News Agency said the force included a small number of Canadian and Australian volunteers. The Reuters despatch to London identified one of the Canadians as Capt. Roy MacKenzie of Windsor, Ont., who said he helped blow up a railway line and once was swept nearly two miles down the Irrawaddy River.)

Epic Struggle.

(The special communique, however, listed only "British, Burman, Gurkha and Indian troops" as participating. "This force has campaigned in the heart of Central Burma since the middle of February, in enemy-controlled territory east of the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers," the communique said.)

Now, when most of them have completed the hazardous, heart-breaking climb back over half a dozen mountain ranges to re-enter India, the story of their exploits has been revealed.

The raid was an epic struggle against the jungle, with death, valor, despair and victory marching along with Britain's fighting men as they flung their weight against the Japanese.

Fighting side by side with their heat-tempered, brown-skinned comrades, a regiment of Britain's city-bred tinkers, tailors and bookkeepers matched their wits against the Japanese and the jungle and won— not decisively, but won. Several columns travelled nearly 1,000 miles

and endured the bitterest hardships.

The raid began Feb. 15 when a force of whom a third were Britons crossed the Chindwin River on the Burma side of the frontier. It was at a somewhat critical hour, as in North Burma on the Salween front the Japanese were pressing hard against the Chinese. A band of approximately 5,000 loyal Burma tribal fighters were surrounded in North Burma and threatened with annihilation by a Japanese punitive expedition.

Sevenfold Task.

But the man who led the expedition had a further end in view. He is Brig. Charles Orde Wingate, 39, the same man who, at the beginning of the Ethiopian campaign, three years ago, led 2,000 Sudanese and 1,000 Ethiopian warriors in operations that resulted in the capture or disposal of 40,000 Italians. He is a relative of Lawrence of Arabia, to whom he bears a strong resemblance.

Wingate wanted to demonstrate that he could take even relatively second-rate troops and turn them into jungle fighters who could beat the Japanese. Most of the troops had six months of preliminary jungle training, but others had as little as one month of preparation for the big raid.

Before they returned, many trying weeks later, they were convin-

ced they had accomplished a sevenfold task:

They had destroyed several bridges and had blown up 100 miles of railroad in 70 different places.

They had delayed a Japanese move against the Chindwin River barrier, near the Indo-Burma frontier.

They had taken the pressure off the Chinese to the north.

They had saved 5,000 loyal native warriors by compelling the Japanese to withdraw their punitive expedition for use against the raiders.

They had destroyed the Japanese feeling of security in Burma.

They had received invaluable training in jungle warfare, and they had proved Wingate's contention that quick training could make Allied troops equal to the jungle and the Japanese.

Supplied by Plane.

The raiders entered the jungle with nearly 1,000 mules loaded with supplies. But once they reached Central Burma the bulk of their

supplies were dropped to them by a small squadron of planes. The planes shuttled back and forth from a border base, defying Japanese fighters as they sought out their rendezvous with the raiding columns on the ground.

In eight columns the raiders crossed the Chindwin River and headed 150 miles through the jungle and over the mountains toward the Irrawaddy. That river and its valley form the main north-south line of communications in Burma. There was no easy route. The mountain ranges of Burma run north and south, and up and down these Wingate led his men.

Before they returned they ate most of their mules and horses and came to look upon corned beef as manna when it was dropped from the supply planes. They learned how to live for days on bamboo shoots and banana palm leaves, knew what it meant to see comrades fall out from sickness or wounds and be left behind to the mercies of the Japanese.

Japs in Panic.

They knew what it meant to see Japanese troops in complete panic, firing machine guns in every direction and racing truckloads of troops up and down the highways, not knowing where or when they would meet the British forces.

For a short time the Japanese apparently thought the invasion of Burma had begun, for they pulled whole divisions into new positions and filled the woods with scouting parties.

Some humorous and exciting times were recalled by soldiers and officers. Lieut. G. C. Bruce of Glasgow took Tagaung with four men. He speaks Burmese.

"We walked into town and met about 30 Burmese who were fighting on the Japanese side," he said. "I told them they were foolish to fight for the Japanese. I pointed to the sky and said I would call our bombers in to destroy them if they continued to resist.

"Just then 12 of our bombers came roaring over. They didn't know I was down there and I didn't know they were coming. But those Burmese threw down their arms and pleaded for mercy. Six of my men had been left in the brush to support us. Eleven of us blocked traffic on the Irrawaddy for five days. We wouldn't let any supply boats move either way."