

2021

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF:

LIEUTENANT GENERAL W. D. A. LENTAIGNE

A concise biography of Lieutenant General Walter David Alexander LENTAIGNE, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., an officer in the British Indian Army between 1918 and 1947. He commanded Special Force in 1944 after the death of Major General WINGATE and later helped shape the post-partition Indian Army.

Copyright ©www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk (2021)

A Concise Biography of Lieutenant General W. D. A. LENTAIGNE

Version: 3_1
This edition dated: 8 February 2021
ISBN: Not yet allocated.

All rights reserved. No part of the publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means including; electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, scanning without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A. (copyright held by author)
Assisted by: Stephen HEAL
Published privately by: The Author – Publishing as:
www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Contents

	<u>Pages</u>
Introduction	3 – 4
Early Life and Career	4 – 5
The Second World War	5 – 7
Special Force (The Chindits)	7 – 11
General Officer Commanding Special Force	12 – 13
Battle for Indaw, White City and Blackpool	14 – 18
Relationship Between LENTAIGNE and STILWELL	18 – 20
The Final Days of the Chindit Campaign	20 – 21
Withdrawal of Special Force	21 – 24
Post Second World War	25 – 26
Family Life	26
Bibliography and Sources	27 – 28

**Lieutenant General Walter David Alexander LENTAIGNE,
C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.***



Introduction

Lieutenant General LENTAIGNE was an officer in the British Indian Army during the Second World War best known for assuming command of 'Special Force' following the death of its creator and leader Major General WINGATE, but he also played a key role in the development of the post-partition Indian Army.

Early Life and Career

Walter David Alexander LENTAIGNE, known to his peers as 'Joe', was born on 15 July 1899 in Rangoon, Burma.¹ He was the eldest son of His Honour, Mr Justice Benjamin Dorgan Walter Plunkett LENTAIGNE, who was a judge in the Burma High Court. He was baptized on 22 July 1899 in Rangoon into the Roman Catholic faith.

Walter's father had been born on 28 March 1865 in Dublin, Ireland, and he married Elizabeth Monica COFFEY (1864 – 1935) on 5 September 1894 in Ireland. Their first child, a daughter, was born on 24 August 1896, and she was baptized Vivienne Mary Marion Laud LENTAIGNE (1896 – 1984). Walter David Alexander LENTAIGNE followed in 1899, and then another son, Charles Nugent LENTAIGNE (26 April 1901 – 1981), who was born in Dublin. Mr Justice LENTAIGNE retired to live in Navan in County Meath in Ireland, where he died on 3 March 1941. His wife Elizabeth LENTAIGNE had died on 14 August 1935.

Walter was soon brought from Rangoon by his mother to live with her relations in Fitzwilliam, Dublin. In 1901, he was living at Fitzwilliam Place at his uncle's home. Living at this address in March 1901 were Henry Alfred Robert COFFEY, and also resident there were David Daniel COFFEY, Louisa Mary COFFEY, Elizabeth Mary LENTAIGNE, and her children Vivienne and Walter. There were three domestic servants living at the address as well.

The LENTAIGNE family were members of the Roman Catholic faith, and so Walter was educated at the Oratory School, Edgbaston, Birmingham. On 1 October 1918, LENTAIGNE was commissioned on the Unattached List, bound for the Indian Army. This was at the end of the First World War, and too late for him to see active service in the war. Eleven days after being commissioned on the Unattached List, he joined the 4th Gurkha Rifles (service number IA/145). His regiment was serving on the North West Frontier at that time. On 1 October 1919, a year after he commissioned, LENTAIGNE was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant. His regiment served in Waziristan between 1919 and 1924, where LENTAIGNE was Mentioned in Despatches on 12 June 1923. He was promoted Captain on 1 October 1924, six years after his commission. He served again on the North West Frontier from 1930 until 1935.

¹ It is not known how LENTAIGNE gained this nickname, or who gave it to him.

Between 10 January 1935 and 21 January 1937, LENTAIGNE attended the Staff College at Camberley, which was a key milestone in his career. The British Indian Army was permitted to send only two students to Camberley for each course, and so there was a tendency to ensure that those who attended there would reflect well on the Indian Army. There was a reciprocal arrangement for two British officers to attend the Indian Staff College at Quetta. On qualifying, LENTAIGNE had the important letters *p.s.c.* added to his entry in the Army List, which signified that he had passed the course and was eligible to fill a staff appointment in the Army. This was also seen as an important caveat to achieve promotion beyond the Regimental rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

With eighteen years' service, LENTAIGNE was promoted to the rank of Major on 1 October 1936, and on completion of his staff course, he returned to his regiment and again saw active service in Waziristan. He was Mentioned in Despatches for the second time on 18 February 1938. LENTAIGNE's first staff appointment came on 3 July 1938, as Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master-General in the Quarter-Master-General's Branch at Army Headquarters, India.

The Second World War

At the outbreak of the Second World War, LENTAIGNE was still working at Army Headquarters in Delhi. He relinquished that appointment on 29 November 1940, and on 1 December, he was promoted Local Lieutenant Colonel and became an instructor (G.S.O. 2) at the Staff College, Quetta. He was only there for about eight months as he left the Staff College on 17 July 1941, and two days later, he was promoted to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the 1st Battalion, 4th Prince of Wales's Own Gurkha Rifles. The battalion was at this time based at Ambala on internal security duties. He was promoted Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 19 October 1941, after the usual three-month period holding the Acting rank. In November 1941, the battalion joined the 48th Indian Infantry Brigade, 19th Indian Division.

On 8 December 1941, Japanese troops invaded Malaya and their Navy attacked the U.S. base at Pearl Harbor.² This resulted in the United States of America entering the Second World War and brought the whole of the Far East into a world war. The effect on the British Indian Army was significant. Prior to this event, its main role was to raise and train formations for deployment in the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres. Now, conflict was here in South East Asia.

The Japanese invaded Burma in January 1942, advanced rapidly and captured Moulmein. The 48th Indian Brigade was sent to Burma in January 1942, and after a short period in Army Reserve, it came under command of the 17th Indian Division. The brigade moved forward and reached the Bilin River, where a battle took place as the Japanese forced the British and Indian positions compelling the 17th Indian Division to retire back towards the Sittang River.

² Due to Hawaii being the other side of the international date line, it was still 7 December in Hawaii although it was 8 December in Japan and Malaya. In effect, these events occurred on the same day, with the invasion of Malaya preceding the air attack on Pearl Harbor by one hour.

The brigade commander, Brigadier Noel HUGH-JONES ordered LENTAIGNE to take his battalion back over the single bridge that crossed the wide river in this locality and secure the west bank. The Japanese attacked the British and Indian units on the eastern bank of the river, and in the confusion, the Sittang River Bridge was blown stranding many troops on the eastern side of the river. LENTAIGNE's battalion became the only unit within the 17th Indian Division that was anywhere near full strength, with the division having to be withdrawn from front line operations to rest and refit.

The brigade was involved in the defence of Pegu (now known as Bago) between 5 and 7 March, and then withdrew to Hlegu and Prome up the valley of the Irrawaddy River. On 6 April 1942, the brigade came under command of the 1st Burma Infantry Division. A defence position was established at Kokkogwa (Kokogwar), which the Japanese attacked with force on 11 and 12 April. It was in this action that LENTAIGNE's conduct resulted in him being recommended for a gallantry award. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order on 30 June 1942 for his leadership during that period. His citation reads:

At Kokogwar on 12 April 1942, an attack by another unit had failed to clear the village of Thatodan north of the brigade position. This officer was ordered to attack through the village with tanks in support. He himself organised and launched the attack which cleared the village and restored a most threatening situation.

Later in this action he rallied his battalion in fine style after they had suffered heavy casualties from enemy mortars and from dive bombing attacks.

As on many previous occasions during the campaign Colonel LENTAIGNE proved himself a magnificent leader. Always right forward in a tight corner, the brilliant tactical handling of his unit and his personal courage at all times have been a continuous inspiration to all with whom he has served.

His divisional commander added: *'Very strongly recommended. This officer has previously been recommended for an immediate award. His personal courage and tactical handling throughout the campaign have been an inspiration to all ranks. There has been no more deserving case for an immediate award.'*

There is another description of LENTAIGNE's performance in command of the 1st/4th Gurkha Rifles in the book 'British Commanders' which was published in June 1945 by British Information Services in the USA.

Once this bespectacled giant had his revolver kicked out of his hand in a hand-to-hand scrap with four Japs. He tore the sword from the leader's hand and killed him with it; then, turning on the others, hewed one to the ground and chased the other two back into the jungle.

Another time, when the Japanese had captured an ambulance convoy, a wounded officer in one of them heard a noise which he described as like the roaring of the Bull of Bashan. It was Joe LENTAIGNE arriving. He had charged ahead of his Gurkhas and arrived first, killing several Japs before they caught up with him. The ambulances were saved.

After the action at Kokkogwa, the brigade withdrew to Taungdwingyi and returned to the command of the 17th Indian Division. From there, LENTAIGNE led his battalion to Kyaukse where it crossed the Irrawaddy over the Ava Bridge. The brigade then crossed the Chindwin River at Shwegwyn, and marching back to India, arrived at Tamu in mid-May 1942. Apart from the award of the Distinguished Service Order, LENTAIGNE was Mentioned in Despatches on 28 October 1942.

On return to India, LENTAIGNE was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier (and Acting Colonel) on 5 July 1942 to assume command of the 63rd Indian Infantry Brigade in the 17th Indian Division.³ The brigade had by now withdrawn from Burma and LENTAIGNE replaced Brigadier A. E. BARLOW who had commanded the brigade throughout the Burma campaign.⁴ BARLOW was forty-six years of age and had led the brigade during the exhausting Burma campaign from December 1941 until May 1942; whereas LENTAIGNE was forty-two years of age (he was just short of his forty-third birthday) and had proved himself an exceptional battalion commander during the same campaign.

On 6 February 1943, LENTAIGNE was promoted Temporary Brigadier, Temporary Colonel and War Substantive Lieutenant Colonel, after six months in the Acting rank. The rank of War Substantive Lieutenant Colonel meant that he would not drop below that rank during the period of hostilities (plus one year), even though his substantive rank on the Army List was that of Major. LENTAIGNE relinquished the command of the 63rd Indian Infantry Brigade on 28 March 1943 and moved to raise the new 111th Indian Infantry Brigade.

Special Force (The Chindits)

The 77th Indian Infantry Brigade had been formed in June 1942 by Brigadier Orde WINGATE as a Long-Range Penetration formation. This brigade was being prepared for the First Chindit operation in early 1943. General WAVELL, the Commander-in-Chief in India decided to raise a second brigade formation, titled the 111th Indian Infantry Brigade. LENTAIGNE was chosen to lead this formation and assumed command on 29 March 1943.⁵

³ The Army List gives the date of LENTAIGNE's promotion to Acting Brigadier as 6 August 1942, but his personal record gives the date of 5 July 1942. The date of his promotion to the rank of Temporary Brigadier suggests that he was promoted on 5th July but had a break of thirty-two days in the rank of Acting Brigadier. There is no explanation for this in his Personal File. As technically, the rank of Brigadier was an appointment (it was not made an official rank in the British Army until 1948) a Brigadier would also hold the official Army rank of Colonel.

⁴ BARLOW is shown in the Army List as not relinquishing command of the brigade until 30 July 1942. It is possible that BARLOW was exhausted after the Burma campaign and was replaced on or about 5 July 1943.

⁵ This date is shown variously as 29 and 30 March. This date is taken from his personal file (see Sources).

This brigade was formed to join 'Special Force' (later known as the 3rd Indian Infantry Division), but more commonly known as the 'Chindits' on account of their formation badge. The brigade was not involved in the First Chindit expedition, as it was still forming. In September, the 77th Indian Brigade had returned from Burma and was refitting and resting. The 111th Indian Brigade joined it at Jhansi and then they moved to the Central Provinces the following month for combined training with the expanded Special Force. The brigade commanded by Brigadier LENTAIGNE comprised the following units, which had been formed into columns for the forthcoming operation.

111th Indian Infantry Brigade

48 Column

(Advanced Brigade H.Q.)

41 & 46 Columns

(2nd Bn. The King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster))

26 & 90 Columns

(1st Bn. The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles))

30 & 40 Columns

(3rd Bn. 4th Prince of Wales's Own Gurkha Rifles)

49 & 94 Columns

(4th Bn. 9th Gurkha Rifles)

WINGATE was obviously impressed by LENTAIGNE, describing him in a confidential report as: '*An excellent brigade commander. A good and thorough tactician. Enjoys the respect and confidence of all ranks in his brigade to an unusual degree. Vigorous and hard mentally and physically. Loyal and adaptable.*'⁶

On 7 October 1943, WINGATE was admitted to hospital, and Brigadier LENTAIGNE was appointed the acting Commander of the L.R.P. Force until WINGATE resumed command on 19 November 1943.⁷ The Long-Range Penetration Force was initially called 'Special Force', but it was redesignated the 3rd Indian Division on 12 March 1944, for deception reasons. The Headquarters were formed at Jhansi with effect from 18 September 1943, as Special Force. Brigadier Orde WINGATE, D.S.O. *, was promoted to the rank of Acting Major General on 16 November 1943, having spent a period in hospital between 7 October and 10 November, during which period Brigadier LENTAIGNE officiated as Special Force Commander (see above and footnote). The first two subordinate brigades under command of Special Force were the 77th and 111th Indian Infantry Brigades.

⁶ Indian Army Records of Service L/MIL/14/1860

⁷ It is unclear whether LENTAIGNE was promoted to the unpaid acting Major General. Usually, an officer does not become eligible for promotion in these circumstances until the General Officer Commanding has been absent for twenty-nine days, and they have officiated as G.O.C. for this period. It appears that LENTAIGNE was only eligible for promotion between 4 and 10 November 1943, and as this was less than twenty-one days, it was not published in the Indian or London Gazette.

The Commander-in-Chief, The Army in India, General WAVELL, decided to incorporate the British 70th Infantry Division into Special Force. This division commenced reorganizing for the role of Long-Range Penetration (L.R.P.) on 6 September 1944, and on 25 October 1943, formally handed over its units to Special Force. The 70th Infantry Division was formally disbanded on 24 November 1943, with its General Officer Commanding becoming the Deputy Commander of Special Force. By 25 October, the five brigades had concentrated at Gwalior, and intensive training commenced in anticipation of deployment into northern Burma in early 1944. On 15 November 1943, a sixth brigade, the 3rd (West Africa) Infantry Brigade was added to the establishment of Special Force. There were several changes in the plans regarding the deployment of Special Force, but on 14 January 1944, Lieutenant General SLIM, G.O.C.-in-C. Fourteenth Army, agreed with Major General WINGATE for an operation to be launched on or about 25 February in support of the Northern Combat Area Command under Lieutenant General STILLWELL, U.S. Army. Due to intelligence on the movements of Japanese forces, a revised plan was issued on 16 January, and following more discussion, the final plan was agreed on 1 February 1944. The first movements commenced on 5 February 1944.

In January 1944, LENTAIGNE was tasked by Major General WINGATE to prepare for his brigade to walk into Burma. LENTAIGNE investigated this possibility, but he found that the Japanese had moved forward to the Chindwin River and were watching all crossing places. WINGATE modified the plan, with 111th Brigade designated to be flown into an area south of Pinlebu on or about 1 March. His instructions were to cut the road between Wuntho and Pinlebu, and to cut the railway line south of Wuntho. His brigade was then to operate in the valley of the Mu River. WINGATE held a conference at Imphal on 31 January and 1 February. During this conference, he explained the governing principle was the concentration of forces at the decisive point, which he indicated was the area within a forty miles' radius of Indaw. The 16th Brigade was to march in and approach Indaw from the north-west, the 77th Brigade was to be flown in and approach Indaw from the north-east, with 111th Brigade being flown in after 77th Brigade and to approach Indaw from the south. The 14th Brigade, 23rd Brigade and 3rd (West African) Brigades were to be held in reserve and deployed to best effect.

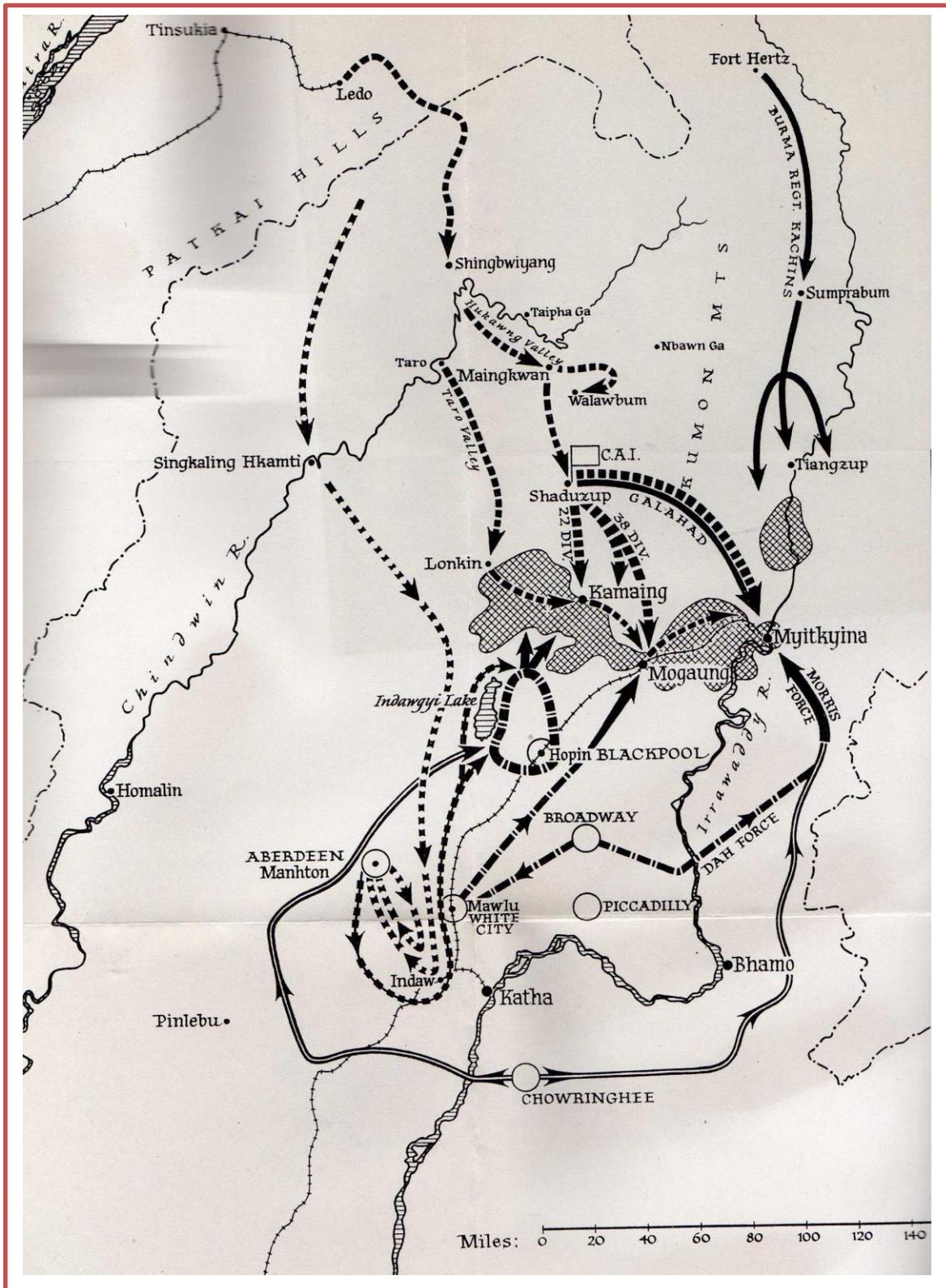
The 4th Bn. 9th Gurkha Rifles was to be detached from the brigade to form an independent unit called 'Morris Force', so called after the name of its commanding officer. This reduced 111th Brigade to three battalions organised as seven columns. No suitable landing area in the Tigyain area could be found for the 111th Brigade, so the plan was modified again for them to be flown into the landing sites of the 77th Brigade, codenamed 'Broadway' and 'Piccadilly'. The 111th Brigade would fly in after 77th Brigade had landed.

The second Chindit campaign, Operation 'Thursday', was launched on 6 March 1943. As the gliders and planes prepared to take off, a photo reconnaissance of the landing sites showed that logs had been laid across the ground at Piccadilly. This caused a delay of about one hour, but the landings commenced and now concentrated on Broadway.

The initial landings resulted in congestion at Broadway. As it was deemed necessary to get 111th Brigade into action before the Japanese reacted, the brigade had to be switched to another landing site called 'Chowringhee', where it landed overnight 6 and 7 March. The Brigade Headquarters, 3rd Bn. 4th Gurkha Rifles and the 4th Bn. 9th Gurkha Rifles landed at Chowringhee on 8 and 9 March, however, the 1st Bn. The Cameronians and 2nd King's Own Royal Regiment had to land at Broadway leaving the brigade dispersed.

The 4th Bn. 9th Gurkha Rifles moved off independently, with the three other battalions concentrating in the Nankan and Kyaikthin area where they cut Japanese communications. The brigade headquarters and the 3rd Bn. 4th Gurkha Rifles (Nos 30 and 40 Columns) set off from Chowringhee towards the Irrawaddy River leaving the landing site abandoned. The Japanese had detected the presence of the landing ground and proceeded to bomb it for three days. Four gliders were landed on the riverbank to assist 111th Brigade. These gliders carried collapsible boats and other river crossing equipment. Two of the gliders were then 'snatched off' the sandbank. With suitable equipment now available, LENTAIGNE decided to commence the crossing on 12 March. The brigade was covered by fighter patrols overhead and bombing of two nearby towns.

Problems soon arose with the outboard motors for the boats, and coupled with the stubbornness of the mules, these factors began to delay the crossing. By noon, it became obvious to LENTAIGNE that the crossing could not be completed that day. Air cover was not available the next day and there were indications that a Japanese force was moving south towards the crossing point. LENTAIGNE had to make a difficult decision. He decided to send 40 Column from the 3rd Bn 4th Gurkha Rifles back to join 'Morris Force' east of the Shweli River. LENTAIGNE pressed on with just his brigade headquarters and 30 Column towards his objective. He hoped that he would be able to meet up with the 2nd Bn. The King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster) and the 1st Bn. The Cameronians, but then he heard that the King's Own were delayed. LENTAIGNE decided to take his headquarters and 30 Column towards Nankan. On 26 March, his force blew up a railway bridge four miles south west of the village.



General Officer Commanding Special Force

On 24 March 1944, the General Officer Commanding Special Force, Major General WINGATE, died in a plane crash. The initial reports received at Headquarters, Special Force and at 14th Army were that WINGATE was missing. As the hours passed, a sense of foreboding spread across Special Force. It had been created around the personality of its founder, WINGATE. He was not a man who could be viewed dispassionately, indeed that is not how WINGATE himself wished to be seen. SLIM suggests that WINGATE saw himself as a prophet, a crusader. Many of his key personnel in Special Force held him in high regard, appreciating his drive and determination to get things done, while coping with and accepting his idiosyncrasies. He was unconventional, as was his concept of long-range penetration forces.

There were four potential successors to WINGATE, for that person had to come from within Special Force due to the operational exigencies and to ensure some degree of continuity. The first was Major General G. W. SYMES, the Deputy General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) Special Force. He had been the divisional commander of the 70th Infantry Division that was incorporated into Special Force. The second possibility was Brigadier D. D. C. TULLOCH, the Brigadier General Staff of Special Force and close confidant of WINGATE. Of the brigade commanders, two were possible replacements, CALVERT and LENTAIGNE. CALVERT was an enthusiastic exponent of WINGATE's concepts and had served on the first Chindit expedition. Lastly, there was LENTAIGNE.

SLIM consulted TULLOCH, phoning him on 26 March. TULLOCH ruled himself out of contention, rightly drawing to SLIM's attention the fact he had never commanded a Chindit column in the field, nor indeed any formation. Major General SYMES, the Deputy General Officer Commanding, was the most senior of the four candidates and in some ways the most logical appointment. Although SYMES had commanded a brigade and a division during the war, he had been unfortunate in that on neither occasion had he commanded a formation during active operations. The brigade he commanded was based in the United Kingdom, with the division based in Syria and then India.

The other aspect counting against SYMES's selection to command Special Force was that he was not perceived as embracing the Special Force ethos. His division had been absorbed into Special Force and he with it. He had lost his command and been given an administrative role within Special Force. WINGATE was the inspiration behind Special Force and led it with his own individual style. It appears from extracts of SYMES's diary that he and TULLOCH did not hold each other in high regard and, that neither SLIM, nor TULLOCH, gave any serious consideration for SYMES to replace WINGATE.⁸ The reason for this appears in SLIM's autobiography, where he states: *'This was one of those cases in which seniority should not be taken much into account. To step into Wingate's shoes would be no easy task. His successor had to be someone known to the men of Special Force, one who had shared their hardship and in whose skill and courage they could trust.'*

⁸ See 'Burma – The Longest War 1941-1945 by Louis ALLEN, pages 349 to 351.

This left CALVERT and LENTAIGNE, the two original Chindit brigade commanders. LENTAIGNE was the oldest and most senior in service. At this time, he was aged forty-four years having been born in 1899. The next eldest was Brigadier PEROWNE, (23rd Brigade) who was born in 1902, then Brigadier BRODIE (14th Brigade) who was born in 1903 (the same year as WINGATE). Brigadier GILLMORE (3rd W.A. Brigade) was born in 1905, which left the two youngest as FERGUSSON (16th Brigade) who was born in 1911 and CALVERT as the youngest having been born in 1913.

Although he had served with the First Chindit expedition, and was known to be brave and resourceful, CALVERT was considered too young in age and service for a demanding higher command. This left LENTAIGNE, who TULLOCH reported to SLIM was *'the one most in tune with WINGATE'*. This comment has been questioned for its honesty however, as WINGATE's own assessment of LENTAIGNE shows, at the time it was made, it was probably seen as being accurate.⁹ SLIM saw LENTAIGNE (who had served with distinction in the First Burma Campaign with SLIM) as the most balanced and experienced of WINGATE's commanders. LENTAIGNE was appointed acting commander of Special Force on 27 March, and was flown from his brigade headquarters on 30 March 1944, on being promoted to the rank of Acting Major General and formally assuming command of Special Force. LENTAIGNE appointed his Brigade Major, Major J. H. MASTERS the commanding officer of the 111th Brigade, which now comprised five columns as the 1st Bn. The Cameronians had joined the brigade.

Special Force was not a unified formation, with its brigades operating across a wide area. The 77th Brigade had formed a stronghold at Broadway and had also created a block on the railway line just to the north of Henu that was called 'White City'. The Japanese had not attacked Broadway since it was established, but then they assaulted the stronghold in strength on 27 March. The 14th Brigade was in the process of being flown into a new stronghold called 'Aberdeen'. WINGATE had issued orders to Brigadier BRODIE, the commanding officer of the 14th Brigade to move south to disrupt the Japanese communications between Wuntho and the Chindwin River.

The 16th Brigade was tired having walked into Burma and was approaching Indaw. Brigadier FERGUSSON had requested support to take Indaw, with WINGATE stating that the 14th Brigade would be available to do so. WINGATE then issued different orders to Brigadier BRODIE, without telling FERGUSSON of the change of plan. This decision left FERGUSSON with only his tired brigade to take and hold Indaw, which it failed to do. The sixth brigade in Special Force, the 3rd (West African) Brigade was being flown in to provide garrison troops for the strongholds so it was not available to reinforce FERGUSSON. The 23rd Brigade, meanwhile, had been diverted to provide support to XXXIII Indian Corps in relieving the threat to Kohima so was not available to Special Force, leaving LENTAIGNE with only five brigades under his command. Morris Force was still acting independently as ordered.

⁹ See BIDWELL, *The Chindit War*, pages 160 and 161.

The Battle Around Indaw, White City and Blackpool

Major General LENTAIGNE flew to the headquarters of Special Force at Sylhet to assume command of the formation. As he arrived to assume command of Special Force, events were developing rapidly. FERGUSSON had arrived in the locality of Indaw with the 16th Brigade, having been ordered by WINGATE to take the most direct route to the town. FERGUSSON found the supply of water was limited north of the town. The Japanese garrison comprised some two-thousand troops, who were expecting an attack from the north and had arranged their defences accordingly. The II Battalion, 29th Regiment was deployed to a village called Thetkegyin at the northern edge of the lake, with detachments at Auktaw and crossing of the Indaw Chaung. The II Battalion, 51st Regiment and 141st Independent Battalion were deployed around Indaw town and the two airfields that provided the tactical significance of the town.

The Chindits ran into a Japanese patrol in a village called Auktaw, about five miles north of Indaw lake. This destroyed any surprise the Chindits may have hoped for and alerted the defenders to the approach of the British forces. FERGUSSON ordered the 45th Reconnaissance Regiment to make a direct approach via Thetkegyin, while the 2nd Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment advanced along the Kyagaung Range to the east as this provided a degree of cover. One column of the 2nd Bn. The Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) was to take a circuitous route to approach Indaw from the south, while the other column of the regiment blocked the Banmauk to Indaw road.

The men of the 45th Reconnaissance Regiment walked straight into the main defensive positions held by the II Bn., 29th Regiment at Thetkegyin on Sunday, 26 March 1944, and they suffered heavy casualties as a result. Unable to force their way through to Indaw, the two columns moved off to the west to find water. Unfortunately, the loss of the column's wireless set meant that FERGUSSON and force headquarters were unaware of this.

On 26 March, the Leicestershire columns reached Inwa on the eastern bank of the lake without meeting any opposition, but the leading column of the Queen's Regiment had been ambushed south of Indaw on 23 March. They had suffered many casualties and lost most of their mules, mortars, and ammunition. It was then that FERGUSSON found out that WINGATE's promise of reinforcement from the 14th Brigade was not happening. On 29 March, FERGUSSON decided to break contact and retire northwards to the hills to reorganise.

This meant that when LENTAIGNE assumed effective command, the attack on Indaw had failed, the 14th Brigade was landing at Aberdeen, the 111th Brigade was moving north-west to Pinlebu, and the 77th Brigade was beginning to face severe pressure on its stronghold of 'White City'. He decided therefore, to countermand WINGATE's orders, directing the 14th Brigade to take over 111th Brigade's original role of preventing the Japanese from bringing reinforcements to the Indaw area. The next day, 31 March, LENTAIGNE flew to Comilla to meet with Lieutenant General SLIM, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of 14th Army.

With the death of WINGATE, a review of the current position took place. On the evening of 3 April, the conference at Jorhat came to an end, so LENTAIGNE flew to Aberdeen to meet with his brigadiers. His orders were for two of his brigades to operate northwards in support of American and Chinese troops, with two other brigades operating towards the Chindwin River. The meeting was robust, with both Brigadier CALVERT (77th Brigade) and Brigadier FERGUSSON (16th Brigade) arguing against further dispersal of their forces. CALVERT recommended the strengthening of White City and another effort to capture Indaw. LENTAIGNE felt he could not commit himself to that course without knowing if the 23rd Brigade would rejoin Special Force, it having been detached to support XXXIII Indian Corps around Kohima.

On 6 April, LENTAIGNE decided to concentrate the 3rd (West African) Brigade at White City, without the 6th Bn. The Nigeria Regiment, which was then providing the garrison at Aberdeen. The 45th Reconnaissance Regiment was placed under CALVERT's command, with the 2nd Bn. The Leicestershire Regiment also being loaned to CALVERT to conduct operations around White City.

LENTAIGNE chaired a conference at the headquarters of Special Force on 7 April, which was attended by staff officers from 14th Army. This conference agreed that any move of Special Force towards the Chindwin River was risky and of little tactical value. Two days later, LENTAIGNE met with the Supreme Commander, Admiral MOUNTBATTEN, and Lieutenant General SLIM. It was agreed that the sole task of Special Force was to operate in support of the American Lieutenant General STILWELL, and his joint American and Chinese Northern Area Combat Command.

LENTAIGNE and his staff had to prepare a new plan. He felt that the initial dispersal of the units towards the Chindwin River and the failure to capture Indaw had meant that Special Force had not been as effective as intended. The Japanese offensive at Imphal and Kohima had limited reinforcement and led to a diversion of vital aircraft from the support of Special Force. LENTAIGNE also felt that White City could not be held indefinitely, as the Japanese knew of its existence and were applying increasing pressure on the defenders of White City. He was also conscious that some of his units were tired already, in particular, the men of the 16th Brigade were close to exhaustion after their long march and recent battles. Another factor was the availability of suitable landing strips for Dakota aircraft, vital to evacuate casualties and bring in supplies.

LENTAIGNE summed up his options and decided to create a new block and stronghold near the railway in the Hopin area, some fifty miles north of White City. This new stronghold was to be called 'Blackpool'. The 16th Brigade was to be flown out of the area back to India, after which the strongholds at 'Broadway', 'White City' and 'Aberdeen' would be evacuated. This would leave LENTAIGNE four brigades concentrated in an area and able to move north to assist in the capture of the key towns of Mogaung and Myitkyina. The main issue that his plan created was to leave the Kachin people to the mercy of the Japanese. The Kachins had remained very loyal to the British, giving much needed practical support to them. LENTAIGNE assessed that the Japanese would be too busy to persecute them so making it an acceptable risk to take.

Lieutenant General SLIM approved the new plan in principle but advised LENTAIGNE to meet with Lieutenant General STILWELL and gain his agreement. This crucial meeting took place on 16 April in a cordial atmosphere. STILWELL determined that Special Force could and should maintain active operations in the Indaw area. STILWELL demanded the deployment of the 19th Indian Division to provide flank cover for his operations. MOUNTBATTEN could not agree with this as the 19th Indian Division was his only formation in reserve.

There were further discussions between STILWELL and MOUNTBATTEN on 25 April, with STILWELL still pressing for Special Force to hold Indaw. These differences in opinion led to MOUNTBATTEN requiring SLIM, STILWELL, and LENTAIGNE to meet to thrash out a solution. This took place on 1 May, with an apparent agreement being reached by the parties involved. Meanwhile, as these discussions took place the fighting on the ground continued. On 4 April, CALVERT had sent out the two columns of the 3rd Bn 6th Gurkha Rifles and one column of the 1st Bn. The Lancashire Fusiliers to seize Kadu. By 6 April, the 12th Bn. The Nigeria Regiment had reached White City and joined the defensive perimeter there.

Overnight 6/7 April, three Japanese battalions (the I Bn. 4th Regiment, II Bn. 29th Regiment and 139th Independent Battalion) launched a series of uncoordinated attacks on the northeast and southeast sectors of the perimeter of White City. These attacks became caught in the barbed wire and failed to penetrate the defences. The Japanese attacked again the following night but met a similar outcome. After this, a period of quiet descended on White City.

On 10 April, the Japanese 24th Independent Mixed Brigade launched a fresh series of attacks on White City. The three battalions used in the first two attacks were committed to this attack, reinforced by the 141st Independent Battalion and supported by tanks, mortars, and artillery. These attacks continued over the next few days. The Japanese continued with the same tactics and generally met the same fate. LENTAIGNE flew into White City and saw for himself the large number of Japanese corpses caught on the barbed wire and minefields surrounding the perimeter. It was decided to use quicklime to keep down disease, with light planes being used to fly over and deposit the quicklime.

LENTAIGNE also decided to appoint Brigadier GILLMORE of the 3rd (West African) Brigade as the garrison commander, with Lieutenant Colonel DEGG of the South Staffordshires as his second-in-command. The garrison of White City was now to be, the 1st Bn. The South Staffordshire Regiment, 12th Bn. The Nigeria Regiment and the other column of the 1st Bn. The Lancashire Fusiliers. This would allow CALVERT to put together another striking force comprising the Headquarters, 77th Brigade, 3rd Bn. 6th Gurkha Rifles, 45th Reconnaissance Regiment, 7th Bn. The Nigeria Regiment and one column of the 1st Bn. The Lancashire Fusiliers. CALVERT was to leave the block and counter-attack the Japanese in the area.

In the early hours of 16 April, the Japanese II Battalion 29th Regiment managed to break through a gap blown in the barbed wire. They established a foothold within the southeast corner of the perimeter. The defenders launched a counter-attack and succeeded in throwing the Japanese out of the perimeter. This ended seven days of fighting and the Japanese did not try again to penetrate the defence of White City. It is estimated that the Japanese suffered some seven-hundred casualties in these attacks on White City. The striking force had mixed success and then tried to return to White City. CALVERT found his progress blocked at Mawlu, so withdrew to Tonlon. The Japanese prepared a major assault on the town, but CALVERT had withdrawn already into the hills to the east of White City to rest and refit.

While this fighting was taking place in and around White City, the 111th Brigade had been operating to the west, around Pinbon. They destroyed several Japanese supply dumps. The 14th Brigade was operating to the south of Indaw in the vicinity of Pinlebu. They cut the railway line in the Bongyaung Gorge. Deciding that the Japanese had exhausted their strength in trying to reduce White City, LENTAIGNE decided to make another attempt to capture Indaw. He ordered the 16th Brigade to advance down from the north, with the 14th Brigade attacking from the south, and the 111th Brigade providing flank protection and acting as a reserve. The three brigades encountered little resistance, enabling them to destroy some twenty-one supply and ammunition dumps, about fifteen-thousand gallons of petrol and cut the railway line in sixteen places. On 27 April, the 16th Brigade occupied Indaw West airfield, but found it to be unusable.

Further east, on the eastern bank of the Irrawaddy River, Morris Force had destroyed the main road bridge over the Taping River at Myothit, captured several villages and severely damaged the Bhamo to Myitkyina road. Dahforce had resumed operations in the Nahpaw area. This independent force comprised about seventy British, Kachin and Hong Kong personnel, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Denis Clive HERRING, M.C., who was known as 'Fish', and was an officer in the Burma Rifles having joined this regiment during the war.

With LENTAIGNE's new plan approved, it was implemented without delay. The 111th Brigade moved northwards to occupy the area selected for the new stronghold to be called 'Blackpool' by 7 May. The 16th Brigade moved back to Aberdeen, from where it was flown back to India. The stronghold of White City was abandoned on 9 May after everything of value had been removed.

The Japanese were reinforcing the Burma Area Army with the 53rd Division, the headquarters of which reached Indaw in early May. The divisional commander assumed command of the 24th Independent Mixed Brigade and all other units in the area. The first objective was to reduce the stronghold at White City, but the early withdrawal proved fortuitous, as the garrison would have probably not survived against such a strong and determined Japanese force. The Japanese launched their first significant attacks against Blackpool overnight 14/15 May. Two battalions were used, the II Bn. 146th Regiment and III Bn. 114th Regiment. Heavy fighting resulted, with the Japanese managing to gain a foothold within the perimeter. The Japanese were expelled on the night of 16/17 May, after which they withdrew back from the stronghold.

Special Force came under command of the Northern Area Combat Command on 17 May, with STILWELL losing no time in telling LENTAIGNE that his plan was to close in on Mogaung from the north and south.¹⁰ He ordered Blackpool to be maintained and protected.

On 21 May, CALVERT reported that he had ascertained that there were about four-thousand Japanese troops in Mogaung. LENTAIGNE, acting on STILWELL's orders, himself ordered CALVERT to attack. The 14th Brigade and 3rd (West African) Brigade had moved from Aberdeen and White City towards the Indawgyi Lake area. The weather deteriorated on 20 May, and two days later, the Japanese had closed in on Blackpool. They started shelling the stronghold and also brought in anti-aircraft guns to dominate the airstrip.

The perimeter was penetrated on 24 May, and then again, the next day. Food supplies were exhausted, with ammunition running low. Major MASTERS, the officiating commanding officer of 111th Brigade decided that he had no option but to withdraw, which he did starting at 08.00 am. LENTAIGNE offered STILWELL the support of Morris Force, but STILWELL rejected them, believing he could take the town by a coup-de-main. The airfield at Myitkyina was taken on 17 May. On 24 May, an attack by two Chinese regiments failed to take the town, allowing the Japanese to reinforce the garrison there.

Relationship between LENTAIGNE and STILWELL

Tensions increased between the British and American commanders. LENTAIGNE requested a meeting with STILWELL, which took place on 25 May. LENTAIGNE gave an overview of the current situation, which had already been overtaken by events as LENTAIGNE was unaware that Blackpool was in the process of being evacuated. STILWELL demanded to know why LENTAIGNE was considering abandoning Blackpool, when WINGATE had stated that the strongholds could be held against Japanese attacks. STILWELL was unwilling to give permission, stating there was insufficient data contained in LENTAIGNE's report.

The decision to use Morris Force was reversed, with the force being ordered to move on Myitkyina and attack Waingmaw. The units of Special Force were neither trained nor equipped for set piece assaults. The weather remained poor, with heavy rain having washed away most bridges across the Nam Tabet River.¹¹ STILWELL asked LENTAIGNE in writing why Morris Force had not arrived at Waingmaw. LENTAIGNE explained the reasons for the delay, which STILWELL eventually accepted.

¹⁰ In 'Defeat into Victory', SLIM's autobiography, he states that he made the decision to place Special Force under the direct command of STILWELL because the area that Special Force was now operating in required close liaison with the Northern Combat Area Command. Although SLIM states it was his decision, it is likely that the approval of both GIFFARD (11th Army Group) and MOUNTBATTEN (Supreme Commander) would have been sought.

¹¹ This is believed to refer to the river called the Nam Tamai River in northern Myanmar. It may be the reference to this river in the sources used is spelt incorrectly, which is not unusual for geographic locations in Myanmar.

MORRIS attacked on 30 May and again on 2 June. On both occasions, his troops managed to break into the village, but they were unable to hold it. Then MORRIS was ordered to move north and clear a village called Maingna. He began to infiltrate his Gurkhas into the village however, it was found to be strongly held. Brigadier-General BOATNER, the U.S. Commander at Myitkyina blamed MORRIS for the failure of the Chinese to capture Myitkyina. MORRIS was ordered to continue the attacks regardless of consequences, but Morris Force was now spent.

STILWELL continued to criticize Special Force, and LENTAIGNE in particular, for disobeying his orders. MOUNTBATTEN then became involved, so he decided to send SLIM to see STILWELL to resolve the crisis. This meeting took place on 7 June. SLIM's views of the meeting he recorded in his autobiography 'Defeat into Victory'¹². Lieutenant General STILWELL went by the nickname of Vinegar Joe, which he gained earlier in his service, with SLIM remarking on how he still lived up to that name. By all accounts, he was a hard taskmaster to both American and British commanders alike who served under him. He accused his American subordinates of not fighting and of exaggerating in their reports the number of Japanese soldiers killed in action.

The men of the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) of the United States Army, better known as Merrill's Marauders, were very harshly treated by STILWELL. Brigadier-General MERRILL himself suffered from malaria and two heart attacks. His replacement, Colonel Charles N. HUNTER, was so incensed by STILWELL's lack of empathy for his men and their welfare that he prepared a highly critical report, which led to an Army Inspector-General's investigation and congressional hearings.¹³

STILWELL was just as critical of Special Force, accusing LENTAIGNE and his brigadiers of not obeying his orders. Another grievance was that Special Force had abandoned the block at Hopin without justification, thereby allowing the Japanese to feed reinforcements into the Myitkyina area. STILWELL was one of many American officers who was suspicious of the motives of the British and to a degree held Anglophobe views. Several senior American commanders felt that the objective of the British in fighting the Japanese was to reimpose control over their empire in India and the Far East, which for many Americans was an anathema.

SLIM met LENTAIGNE first, and then STILWELL. He found STILWELL bitter and LENTAIGNE indignant. He felt that both exhibited clear signs that they were suffering from an extended period of prolonged strain. STILWELL had refused to meet LENTAIGNE, however, SLIM was one of the few British officers that STILWELL respected, that feeling being mutual between the two. Initially STILWELL vented his frustration onto SLIM, but then he calmed down and became more reasonable. SLIM felt that STILWELL's orders were simple and clear enough, and that Special Force had not carried them out. SLIM pointed out the condition of the men of Special Force, their state of exhaustion made worse by the poor weather conditions now the monsoon had broken.

¹² 'Defeat into Victory' – Pages 279 and 280.

¹³ Wikipedia (Joseph Warren STILWELL and MERRILL's Marauders) and United States Army Center of Military History.

SLIM implied it was more a case that Special Force was unable to carry out STILWELL's orders rather than they were unwilling to do so. SLIM responded to criticism about Morris Force by reminding STILWELL that it was unfair to blame a few hundred men for failing to achieve what thirty-thousand had failed to do.

The crux of the matter appears to have been simply frustration on the part of STILWELL in the inability of the forces under his command to capture the key town of Myitkyina. No matter how hard STILWELL pushed them, no matter how he exhorted them to capture the town, they were unable to do so. STILWELL does not come across as a commander with much empathy for his troops, but his issues were directed towards commanders rather than their men. LENTAIGNE on the other hand comes across as protective towards his men, perhaps even over-protective. Both were under severe stress, and they had been for several months. Command can be a lonely position, with intense external and internal demands for success. It can be argued that STILWELL and LENTAIGNE were both struggling to deliver outcomes that were beyond their skills and ability, and to a degree their control.

The outcome of SLIM's meeting with STILWELL was that the 77th Brigade was to remain under STILWELL's command at Mogaung. It was agreed that when Mogaung had been captured, this brigade could be withdrawn. The other units in Special Force were to be evacuated once Myitkyina had fallen and the 36th Indian Division had arrived in the area. SLIM admits that he expected this to occur 'by the middle of June', so as the capture of Myitkyina dragged on, so did the problems.

The Final Days of the Chindit Campaign

The 14th Brigade and 3rd (West African) Brigade were holding the Kyusanlai Pass and the approaches to Indawgyi Lake. 111th Brigade was resting and refitting after leaving Blackpool guarding the northern shores of the Indawgyi Lake. On 2 June, a Sunderland flying boat landed on the lake to successfully evacuate the first thirty-one casualties. The evacuation continued until the weather stopped flying operations. Between 30 June and 4 July, a further one-hundred and twenty men were flown out on a Sunderland. Another four-hundred were evacuated on rafts to Kamaing from where they were taken to an airfield and flown out. The weather continued to be poor, with heavy and incessant rain making movement difficult.

STILWELL issued fresh orders on 11 June for all formations in the Northern Area, including Special Force. These included tasks for the 14th, 77th and 111th Brigades. LENTAIGNE adjusted the dispositions of the 14th and 3rd (West African) Brigades, with the former concentrating against the railway between Taungni and Pinbaw, and the latter moving into the foothills near Sahmaw. 111th Brigade were ordered to set up blocks on the road and railway near Sahmaw. 111th Brigade found Japanese troops guarding the tracks leading to Sahmaw. Although LENTAIGNE realised that his former brigade was exhausted, he told MASTERS to continue with the operations as soon as possible in spite of the situation of his troops.

On 23 June, LENTAIGNE received a signal from STILWELL demanding to know why 111th Brigade had not completed its task. LENTAIGNE had to once again explain how his troops were now being pushed beyond their limits. CALVERT commenced his attack on 8 June 1944 by attacking Pinhmi village. The village was taken but the bridge was not. CALVERT was opposed by the III Bn. 128th Regiment, which had organised the defences to the east of the town. On 9 June, men from the 77th Brigade crossed the Wetthauk Chaung further south and then attempted to capture the bridge from the other bank. The Japanese resisted fiercely, so it was not captured until 10 June. The 77th Brigade continued its attack, securing the Court House on 11 June, and by the next day, it controlled an area up to the Mogaung River.

The 77th Brigade was now spent. There were only some five-hundred and fifty fit men left ready for duty. They had been behind enemy lines for fourteen weeks and sickness levels were climbing. CALVERT looked to the Chinese for support, which was slow in coming. CALVERT could not wait any longer, so launched his final attack on 23 June to capture the town. By nightfall, the railway bridge over the Mogaung River had been captured and the Chinese occupied the railway station. Pressure was maintained so that on 26 June, the Japanese withdrew from Mogaung allowing the 77th Brigade to secure the town.

The capture of Mogaung was a major feat of arms by the men of 77th Brigade, who were not equipped or trained for a set piece assault on a defended locality, a point made earlier, but worthy of repetition. The brigade had no artillery or tank support; they had been surviving and fighting in difficult circumstances for three months in increasingly appalling weather. Sickness was now endemic within the brigade, the men's resistance to disease being much reduced by their exertions and privations.

Following the transfer of the brigade to STILWELL's command on 17 May, it had suffered no less than nine-hundred and fifty casualties from enemy action, with another one-hundred and fifty evacuated through sickness. By 26 June, only three-hundred were left fit for action. The nature of the battle can be deduced from the fact that two Victoria Crosses were awarded for supreme gallantry during the battle for Mogaung; firstly, and posthumously, to Captain M. ALLMAND, and secondly, to Rifleman Tulbahadur PUN of the 6th Gurkha Rifles.

Withdrawal of Special Force

The defeat of the Japanese Army at Mogaung left them increasingly exhausted and depleted. Myitkyina was still held, but it was increasingly besieged by Chinese forces. The remnants of the highly respected Japanese 18th Division were now retreating through the hills to Sahmaw, from where it was ordered back to Indaw to rest and refit. A defensive line was established at the Sahmaw River, along the line of the railway line, with four battalions. The 24th Independent Mixed Brigade was moved to the Hopin area to protect the lines of communication.

By the end of June, the need to evacuate the rest of Special Force had become obvious. The original expectation was that Long Range Penetration forces would be required to operate behind enemy lines for only twelve weeks. By this time, the men of the 77th Brigade, 111th Brigade and Morris Force had been operating for sixteen weeks. Each of the two brigades now had only about three-hundred men left, having entered the theatre of operations with around three-thousand.

A meeting was held on 30 June when MOUNTBATTEN visited STILWELL's headquarters, to be joined by LENTAIGNE. They discussed when Special Force could be withdrawn. STILWELL stated that he could not allow them to be withdrawn immediately, with LENTAIGNE making clear the state of his men and their capability for further fighting. It was agreed that the medical authorities would examine all the men in 77th and 111th Brigade, with any classified as unfit being evacuated with immediate effect. Both brigades and Morris Force, however, were to remain in the theatre of operations until Myitkyina had been taken. The decision on when to evacuate the 14th Brigade and 3rd (West African) Brigade was deferred.

Not surprisingly, both LENTAIGNE and STILWELL interpreted the outcome of this meeting differently. LENTAIGNE issued a memorandum on the evening of the day of the meeting stating that the Supreme Commander had decided that the 77th Brigade and 111th Brigade were to be evacuated, the former immediately, the latter soon afterwards. STILWELL's view was that neither brigade was to be evacuated until operational conditions allowed. When STILWELL found out that LENTAIGNE had stated that the 77th Brigade was to be evacuated, he approached MOUNTBATTEN to seek clarification. On 2 July, MOUNTBATTEN replied that the two brigades '*should be pulled out as soon as possible but must not be withdrawn from the immediate battle*'. Although this reply appears to have favoured STILWELL's interpretation of the meeting, STILWELL decided to honour the commitment given by LENTAIGNE to evacuate the 77th Brigade with effect from 7 July, when it was flown to India.

The examination of the men of the 77th Brigade and 111th Brigade by medical officers confirmed the dire state of many of them. It was reported that all ranks were physically and mentally worn out. On average, each man had lost between two to three stones of their body weight. Most had suffered at least three attacks of malaria, with some having suffered as many as seven attacks yet were still on active service. Each attack of malaria resulted in extreme tiredness, so that the men's ability to walk carrying their sixty-pound packs was much reduced. The heavy rain as the monsoon broke meant that the men were perpetually wet, as a consequence, they suffered from foot rot, septic sores and prickly heat. Cases of cerebral malaria and typhus fever were rising, and because the men were so physically weak, the number of deaths were also rising.

The remainder of Special Force was concentrated in the Sahmaw and Taungni area to carry out its tasks to disrupt Japanese communications. The 111th Brigade moved forward towards a hill called by the British Point 2171. This dominated the tracks that led to the beginning of what was known as the 'Railway Corridor', the valley down which the railway line ran from Myitkyina to Mandalay.

This hill, just one of many otherwise insignificant hills in Burma, became the site of a vicious and intense battle for control. Units from 111th Brigade managed to take the hill on 8 July. The next day, the Japanese made determined attempts to retake the hill. During this bitter fighting, Major F. G. BLAKER, M.C., The Highland Light Infantry, displayed extreme and notable feats of gallantry that led to him being posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. The 3rd (West African) Brigade moved north to occupy an area in the foothills to the west of Sahmaw. The 14th Brigade moved through the hills to the east of Indawgyi Lake, arriving at a location about three miles west of Point 2171 on 20 July. As the 14th Brigade arrived to relieve the 111th Brigade, and based upon the medical officer's reports, LENTAIGNE decided to evacuate the men of the 111th Brigade. The survivors of Morris Force were evacuated from Myitkyina between 27 and 29 July to fly back to India.

This decision to evacuate the 111th Brigade, LENTAIGNE's former command and one with which he no doubt still had some emotional attachment, created yet another disagreement between LENTAIGNE and STILWELL. STILWELL accused LENTAIGNE of ignoring the Supreme Commander's instructions, whereas LENTAIGNE argued that the medical reports showed that the men of the 111th Brigade were now no longer fit enough for active operations. He further accused STILWELL of keeping the L.R.P. brigades in action long beyond what was acceptable and not organising effectively the fly-in of the 36th Indian Division that was to relieve Special Force. LENTAIGNE stated to MOUNTBATTEN that he stood by his decision and was prepared to take the consequences.

MOUNTBATTEN told STILWELL that he had concerns about the welfare of the men of the L.R.P. brigades, in particular, the 77th and 111th Brigades. He asked to be informed of the dates by which the two brigades were to be evacuated. STILWELL responded by stating that he had not prevented the evacuation of unfit men, but he needed Taungni to be cleared before he could release the 111th Brigade. As there had been another misunderstanding, MOUNTBATTEN sent Major General PLAYFAIR, the Chief of Staff of 11th Army Group, with Major General WEDEMEYER, U.S. Army and Brigadier-General MERRILL, U.S. Army to meet with STILWELL and LENTAIGNE and resolve this situation. They met on 25 June, agreeing that the 111th Brigade was to be evacuated as soon as the 72nd Brigade from the 36th Indian Division had passed through. Events overtook this decision, as the 111th Brigade was reduced now to the strength of just one company, so it was renamed as 111th Company. The unfit men were evacuated, while those still fit were now deployed on garrison duties at Pahok.

The 72nd Indian Brigade, the first elements of the 36th Indian Division, were flown into Myitkyina airfield on 15 July. They concentrated at Mogaung by 28 July and started to advance down the railway corridor in early August. The 14th Brigade were required to regain Point 2171, after the Japanese reoccupied it when it was vacated during the relief of the 111th Brigade. The 3rd (West African) Brigade were now in the Sahmaw position working with 72nd Indian Brigade. This brigade captured Sahmaw on 5 August allowing the West Africans to take over that position, so that the 72nd Indian Brigade could attack Taungni. The 14th Brigade secured all its objectives by 12 August. Meanwhile, under intense pressure, the Japanese evacuated Myitkyina allowing the American and Chinese forces to enter the town almost unopposed on 3 August.

At last, the remaining elements of Special Force could be evacuated. The West Africans were flown out on 17 and 18 August; the 14th Brigade were evacuated between 19 and 26 August; with the final men leaving on 27 August 1944. As it was withdrawn from Burma, Special Force was concentrated back in India. Following debate on the future of the formation, it was decided to disband Special Force. The decision to disband the formation was taken on 5 February 1945, with the units and personnel being posted away over time.

LENTAIGNE was granted the honour of Commander of the Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.) on 26 April 1945 for his gallant and distinguished service in Burma with Special Force. He was recommended for the award by General Sir George GIFFARD, the Commander-in-Chief of the 11th Army Group. The citation reads:

Special Force operations in Burma during the period 1st Mar 44 – 31st Aug 44.

Major General LENTAIGNE originally commanded 111 Bde which he trained and took into Burma by air. His Brigade reached a very high standard and distinguished itself both under his command and that of his successor. When Major General WINGATE was killed in an air crash, Major General LENTAIGNE was appointed to succeed him.

The success of the operations which were arduous in the extreme and called for a high degree of courage and endurance was largely due to General LENTAIGNE's leadership and power of organisation. He co-operated closely with the Chinese American forces in the operations round Myitkyina and Mogaung, which was captured by 77 Bde of the Special Force.

I recommend him for the award of the C.B.E.

The Military Secretary approved the award of the C.B.E. on 19 March, and it was published in the London Gazette on 26 April 1945. Having been promoted to the substantive rank of Lieutenant Colonel on 1 October 1944, LENTAIGNE was also promoted Temporary Major General and War Substantive Colonel on 30 March 1945. Special Force was officially disbanded on 10 March 1945 leaving LENTAIGNE unemployed.

Major General LENTAIGNE was chosen to replace Major General Francis MOORE in command of the 39th Indian Infantry Division on 11 March 1945, and he was appointed to command this formation on 3 April 1945. The 39th Indian Infantry Division was one of two formations in the Indian Army that were responsible for operational training of personnel prior to being posted to a unit on active service in Burma. Because of leave, he assumed command on 11 August 1945, and only held command until 8 October 1945 when he was posted away from the 39th Indian Division.

Post Second World War

LENTAIGNE was appointed the Major General in charge of Administration of North Western Army, but it appears he did not take up this appointment.¹⁴ Instead, LENTAIGNE was selected to attend the first post-war course at the Imperial Defence College (I.D.C.) in London. He left India to travel to the United Kingdom for the start of the course on 2 April 1946. He attended the 1946 course at the I.D.C. in London, and having successfully completed the course, he returned to India in December 1946. During his attendance on the course, he held the rank of Temporary Brigadier, but was promoted to the substantive rank of Colonel on 25 April 1946.

On his return to India, LENTAIGNE was appointed the Director of Military Operations at G.H.Q., India in the rank of Temporary Brigadier. He held this post for only three months, between 18 February and 14 May 1947. On 15 May 1947, he was re-granted the rank of Temporary Major General and appointed Deputy Quarter-Master-General at G.H.Q. India.

With the partition of British India on 15 August 1947, LENTAIGNE was appointed the Deputy Quarter-Master-General (D.W.M.G.) of the Headquarters, British Troops in India and Pakistan and transferred to the Special List (ex-Indian Army) of the British Army. This headquarters assumed responsibility for the remaining British troops in the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan and their withdrawal from the sub-continent. On 1 January 1948, in the New Year's Honours List, LENTAIGNE was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath (C.B.), and he relinquished the appointment as D.Q.M.G. on 15 March 1948. LENTAIGNE had been sent a letter from the Supreme Commander in India on 1 December 1947 advising him that he was to be compulsorily retired as there was no further employment available to him post-partition. On 18 December, he was further advised that his compulsory retirement was cancelled as he had been accepted for service with the Indian Army.

Following partition, the new Indian Army was left without a staff college, as the Indian Staff College was located at Quetta, which was now in Pakistan. A new staff college was established at Wellington, located in the Nilgiri hills in southern India. The first commandant was Brigadier S. D. VERMA, who had been a Colonel at the pre-partition Indian Staff College at Quetta, and who was responsible for moving the Indian element to Wellington. LENTAIGNE was appointed the new commandant on 16 March 1948 in the rank of Temporary Major General, with Brigadier VERMA becoming the Assistant Commandant.

LENTAIGNE was destined to remain in command of the Staff College until 1955, during which period the college established itself as a key part of the formative post-partition Indian Army. At the time of partition, the highest rank held by an Indian officer was Brigadier, so there was a great need to train and develop the future leaders of the Indian Army.

¹⁴ Records show that Major General Francis James WALSH assumed this role on the same date.

By the mere fact LENTAIGNE stayed in post for seven years demonstrates that he held the confidence of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Indian Army, and the senior politicians, of the new state. By 1950, the college developed into the Defence Services Staff College for all the Indian Armed Services. On 1 December 1951, LENTAIGNE was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General. On 1 February 1952, LENTAIGNE formally retired from the British Army, but he continued to be employed by the Indian Armed Forces on a special contract in the rank of Major General. On 1 January 1953, his contract was extended by two years.

LENTAIGNE relinquished the role of Commandant of the Indian Staff College on 12 May 1955 handing over to Major General P. S. GYANI, and in recognition of his achievements, he was granted the rank of Honorary Lieutenant General by the Indian Army. His contract with the Indian Army terminated on the same day. The termination of his contract and his retirement was probably linked to increasing ill-health, as he embarked at Bombay on 15 May 1955, with his wife and son, on the SS Iberia, owned by the P & O Steam Navigation Company Ltd. They arrived in London on 29 May 1955, and gave their family's home address as being Holford House, North Chailey, Sussex. This village is just to the north of Plumpton in East Sussex. LENTAIGNE was clearly in poor health, for he died less than a month after arriving back in the U.K., on 24 June 1955, at a house called 'Hilltop', Plumpton, Sussex, aged fifty-five years. His estate of £19,733 2s 11d passed to his younger brother, and to Alan George Ross ORMISTON.

Family Life

LENTAIGNE married his first wife, Suzanne Catherine MARSDEN, in Abbeyleix, Ireland in June 1928. They had one son and two daughters namely:

- Victor David Richard born on 16 August 1929,
- Susan Eliza Beth born on 17 May 1932,
- Jane Mary Gold born on 16 August 1934.

On 3 February 1948, LENTAIGNE married for the second time. His new wife was Hermione Constance LASCELLES, the daughter of Sir Alfred George LASCELLES, Q.C. and Isabel Carteret THYNNE. She was born on 20 July 1917, so she was thirty years of age when they married. The family home was 'Amberwood', Middleton Road, Camberley, Surrey, although the family lived in India while LENTAIGNE was still employed by the Indian government. They had one son, Alexander John who was born on 23 November 1948 in Ootacamund in south India, and who died on 11 June 2009. Following LENTAIGNE's death, Hermione married Gerald MacLEAN in July 1959. She died on 11 November 1968 aged fifty-one years.

Bibliography and Sources

Primary Sources

Indian Army Records of Service L/MIL/14/1860

Available at: The Asiatic and African Studies Room, The British Library, St. Pancras, LONDON.

Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945

Published by Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946 90, Dartmouth Road, Forest Hill, LONDON. SE23 3HZ [ISBN 1 902366 02 6]

The London Gazette

Date: 14 April 1925	Issue number: 33038	Page number: 2571
Date: 12 June 1925	Issue number: 33056	Page number: 3951
Date: 13 November 1936	Issue number: 34340	Page number: 7349
Date: 26 August 1938	Issue number: 34545	Page number: 5483
Date: 26 June 1942	Issue number: 35611	Page number: 2851
Date: 27 October 1942	Issue number: 35763	Page number: 4691
Date: 15 December 1944	Issue number: 36842	Page number: 5760
Date: 24 April 1945	Issue number: 37051	Page number: 2211
Date: 13 March 1951	Issue number: 39171	Page number: 1363
Date: 30 May 1952	Issue number: 39554	Page number: 2951

London Gazette web-site: <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/>

[Accessed 20th July 2011]

Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives – Location Register

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/lhcma/searchlocreg.cgi>

[Accessed 20th July 2011]

Official Histories

- KEMPTON, Chris *'Loyalty and Honour' – The Indian Army September 1939 – August 1947 Part I Divisions; Part II Brigades; Part III* (Milton Keynes, The Military Press, 2003) [ISBN 0-85420-228-5]
- KIRBY Major General S Woodburn, C.B., C.M.G., C.I.E., O.B.E., M.C. and others *The War Against Japan Volume I – The Loss of Singapore; Volume II – India's Most Dangerous Hour; Volume III – The Decisive Battles; Volume IV – The Reconquest of Burma, Volume V – The Surrender of Japan* First Published: H.M.S.O. (1958)
This edition published by: The Naval and Military Press Ltd (2004)
- Prasad, S. N., K. D. Bhargava, P. N. Khera. *The Reconquest of Burma – Volume I June 1942 – June 1944* (Delhi, Combined Inter-services Historical Section, 1958)
- Khera, P. N. and S. N. Prasad *The Reconquest of Burma – Volume II June 1944 – August 1945* (Delhi, Combined Inter-services Historical Section, 1959)
- Various *Who Was Who Volume V 1951-1960* (A & C BLACK Publishers Ltd., 1960)

Secondary Sources

- BIDWELL, Shelford *The Chindit War* (Sevenoaks, Kent, Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1979) [ISBN 0 340 22213 1]
- CALVERT, Michael *Chindits Long Range Penetration* (England, Ballantine Books Inc., 1973) [ISBN 0 330 24103 6]
- CHINNERY, Philip D. *March or Die* (Shrewsbury, Airlife Publishing Ltd., 1997) [ISBN 1 85310 717 4]
- FERGUSSON, Bernard *Beyond the Chindwin* (London & Glasgow, Fontana books, Third Impression, 1955)
- FERGUSSON, Bernard *The Wild Green Earth* (London, Collins, 1946)

- HAYWOOD, Colonel A., C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O. and CLARKE, Brigadier F.A.S., D.S.O.
The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force (Aldershot, Gale and Polden, 1964)
- IGBINO, John
Spidermen, Nigerian Chindits and Wingate's Operation Thursday 1943 – 1944 (Bloomington, U.S.A., AuthorHouse, 2018) [ISBN 978-1-5462-9618-8]
- Le BUTT, Paul
We Too Can Die (London, Robert Anscombe & Co., Ltd., 1947)
- LEWIN, Ronald
Slim The Standard Bearer (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Press, 1999 reprint of 1976 original) [ISBN 1 84022 214 X]
- LYMAN, Robert
Slim, Master of War (London, Constable, 2004) [ISBN 1-84119-811-0]
- MASTERS, John
Bugles and a Tiger – A Personal Adventure (London, The Reprint Society, 1956)
- MASTERS, John (1961)
The Road Past Mandalay (London, Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2002) [ISBN 0-304-36157-7]
- MILLER, Wilfred
A Chaplain with the Chindits (Lancaster, The King's Royal Regiment, 2004) [ISBN 1 904448 12 7]
- REDDING, Tony
War in the Wilderness – The Chindits in Burma 1943 – 1944 (Stroud, Spellmount, 2011) [ISBN 978 0 7524 6078 9]
- RHODES-JAMES, Richard
Chindit (London, John Murray, 1980)
- ROONEY, David
Mad Mike – A Life of Brigadier Michael CALVERT (Barnsley, Leo Cooper, 1997) [ISBN 0 85052 543 8]
- ROONEY, David
Wingate and the Chindits – Redressing the Balance (London, Arms and Armour Press, 1994) [ISBN 1-85409-204-9]
- SLIM, Field Marshal Sir William
Unofficial History (London, Cassell, Fourth edition January 1960)
- SLIM, Field Marshal Sir William
Defeat into Victory (London, Cassell & Co Ltd, First Edition March 1956 Second Edition May 1956)
- STIBBE, Philip
Return via Rangoon (London, Leo Cooper, 1994) [ISBN 0 85052 392 3]
- THORBURN, Gordon
Jocks in the Jungle – Black Watch & Cameronians as Chindits (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2012) [ISBN 978 1 84884 792 7]
- TOWELL, Bill
A Chindit's Chronicle (London, Authors Choice Press, 2000) [ISBN 0-595-15832-3]
- WILCOX, W. A.
Chindit Column 76 (u/k, Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd, n.d. c1946)

Lieutenant General W. D. A. Lentaigne

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Robert PALMER M.A.

Published by: Minton Sudbrooke Ltd..
