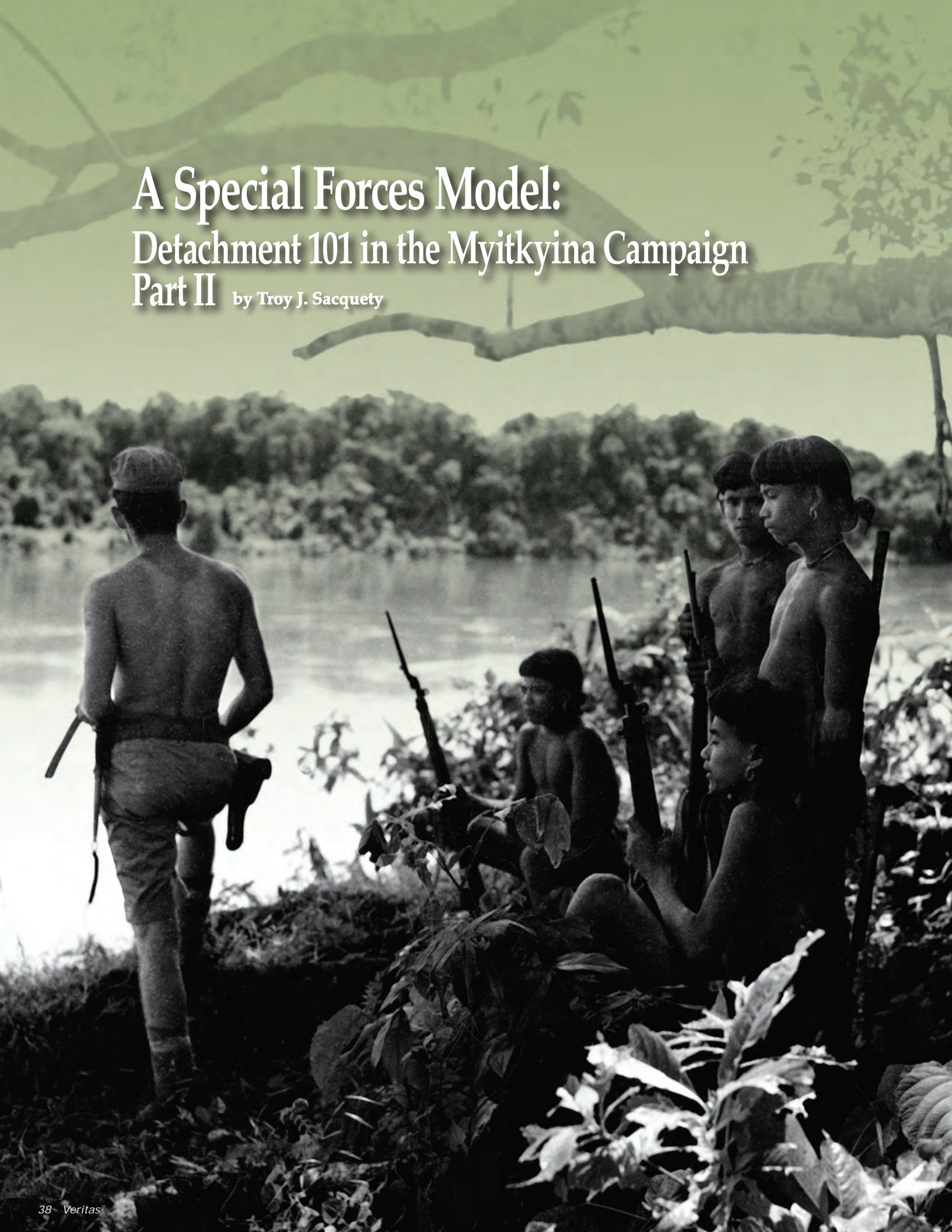


A Special Forces Model: Detachment 101 in the Myitkyina Campaign Part II

by Troy J. Sacquety



On 17 May 1944, a combined Allied force was poised to deliver Myitkyina, the prize of Lieutenant General (LTG) Joseph W. Stilwell's brilliant three-month north Burma campaign. The night before, indigenous Kachin guerrillas of Detachment 101 of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), had led Merrill's Marauders [5307th Composite Unit (Provisional)] unseen to the edge of Myitkyina's airfield. The next morning, Chinese troops and the Marauders surprised the Japanese and quickly captured the airfield. Then, the Chinese 150th Infantry Regiment was given the honor of seizing the city. It was considered an easy task based on the small number of defenders thought to be in Myitkyina.

This assignment would affect thousands of men on both sides for the next three months. On the afternoon of 17 May, the two separate attacking battalions of the 150th Infantry mistook one another for the enemy and inflicted heavy casualties on themselves. Worse yet, the Chinese repeated the same mistake the next day and virtually destroyed the regiment. These debacles gave the surprised Japanese time to reinforce the city. They flooded Myitkyina with troops garrisoned in nearby towns. General Stilwell's quick victory vanished. With the conventional forces of the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) decisively engaged, Detachment 101 was called upon to expand its guerrilla warfare (GW) operations.

This article explains how Detachment 101's GW campaign continuously attrited the Japanese forces in and around Myitkyina to cause its fall in August 1944.¹ The views from three levels of command are provided; the NCAC theater overview, Detachment 101 headquarters, and the OSS field operators. Now, an overview of the theater activities will explain how NCAC's conventional forces became decisively engaged.

The Allied force had captured the Myitkyina airfield in the nick of time. But, the success before the monsoon proved illusionary. The 150th Chinese Infantry Regiment decimated themselves just after the Marauders expended their last bit of energy on the airfield. NCAC had no choice but to pause. It was unprepared to lay "siege" to the city. The monsoon rains arrived and drowned out hope by reducing the flow of badly-needed replacements and supplies. While Myitkyina could not be taken by force, the Japanese had to be attrited and their supply lines cut.

Myitkyina was key to keeping China in the war. China's seaports were occupied and the Japanese controlled the



Lieutenant General Joseph W. Stilwell was the commander of the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC). In reference to his demeanor, his men knew him simply as "Vinegar Joe."



LTG Stilwell needed to capture Myitkyina before the onset of the monsoon rains, which would flood the surrounding countryside, bog down the advance, and aid the Japanese defense. The amount of rain that the monsoon brought could be tremendous as the floods in the Assam region of north India from the 1944 monsoon indicate. Unfortunately, the Allies did not take Myitkyina before the rains began and the Japanese held onto the city for another three months.



*China-Burma-India
SSI*



*Detachment 101
Patch*



*Merrill's Marauders
Patch*



*Chindit
Patch*



A Merrill's Marauders mortar crew bombards Japanese positions in Myitkyina.



Soldiers from Merrill's Marauders use a M1917A1 water-cooled machinegun to fire on Japanese positions about 100 yards away in Myitkyina.

overland route, the Burma Road. Only the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) airlift of supplies from Assam, India to Kunming, China via the hazardous "Hump" route was keeping the Chinese in the war. Reopening an overland route was critical because the airbridge simply could not handle the demand. Capturing Myitkyina would open an alternate overland route, and its airfield would reduce the Japanese fighter threat on the Hump route. The rugged terrain around Myitkyina favored the defense and there were insufficient conventional troops available to isolate the city from Japanese support.

The Allied pause gave the Japanese the opportunity to infiltrate their outlying garrisons into the city. By the end of May 1944, the original Japanese garrison of several

hundred men had grown to 2,500. The Japanese held both sides of the Irrawaddy River that flowed south along the east side of Myitkyina. This vital artery plagued the Allied efforts. By August, the Japanese garrison at Myitkyina—which grew to some 5,000 men—managed to hold off an Allied force of more than 30,000 men.² The Japanese had accepted the loss of Myitkyina, but they planned to delay the Allies as long as possible. The city's commander, Major General Genzu Mizukami, ordered his men to hold the city until the end of August 1944, and then, the surrounding area for another thirty days.³ Fortunately for the Allied forces outside Myitkyina, the Japanese high command was also being threatened by a strong force to the south.

MYITKYINA CAMPAIGN CHRONOLOGY:

- **JAN 1942** JAPANESE FORCES INVADE BURMA FROM THAILAND
- **MAY 1942** ALLIES FINISH THEIR RETREAT FROM BURMA
- **JULY 1942** OSS DETACHMENT 101 ARRIVES IN THE CBI
- **DEC 1942** OSS DETACHMENT 101 FORWARD GROUP ARRIVES AT FT. HERTZ, BURMA
- **FEB 1943** OSS DETACHMENT 101 LAUNCHES "A" GROUP, THE FIRST OF ITS LONG-RANGE PENETRATION ATTEMPTS
- **FEB-MAY 1943** OPERATION LONGCLOTH: THE FIRST CHINDIT OPERATION
- **AUG 1943** OSS DETACHMENT 101 FORMS THE KNOTHEAD GROUP IN THE UPPER HUKAWNG VALLEY
- **AUG 1943** QUEBEC CONFERENCE; U.S. AGREES TO FORM A LONG-RANGE PENETRATION UNIT (MARAUDERS) AND THE FIRST AIR COMMANDO GROUP

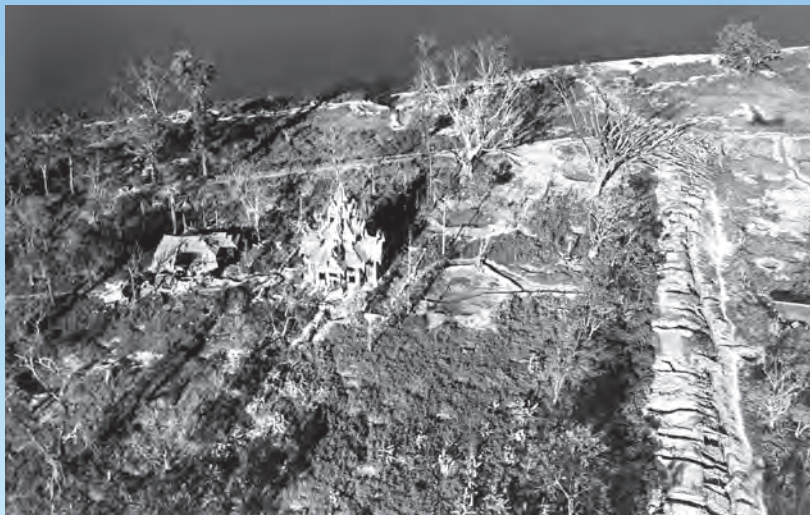
DEFEAT (1942)

REBUILD (1943)



JAN MAY JULY DEC FEB MAR APR MAY JUN

Two independent Allied forces were south of Myitkyina trying to cut off Japanese support. Two Chinese divisions were pushing down the Mogaung Valley to link up with the 3rd Indian Infantry Division, the British long-range penetration group better known as the Chindits. The Japanese 18th Division was directed against them both. The Chindits, in the field since early March, were astride the only rail line that ran to Myitkyina.⁴ These Allied forces were threatening to sever the tenuous supply lines to Myitkyina. The Japanese rushed sufficient reinforcements to contain these divisions. While the two Allied conventional units were diverting Japanese support to Myitkyina, they became decisively engaged by a determined enemy. Now, the NCAC conventional forces in Myitkyina and to the south were stuck slugging it out, unable to break contact and maneuver.



An aerial view of some of the trenches surrounding Myitkyina. The conditions on both sides were atrocious. The troops dug in, turning the battlefield into one more similar to the First World War than to WWII. The monsoon rains fell incessantly; soaking the troops and flooding Allied positions. And, malaria-carrying mosquitoes did not discriminate; both sides were mired in stifling, disease-ridden positions from which they could not gain the upper hand.

The only remaining maneuver element available to LTG Stilwell—and one for which the Japanese did not have a counter—was Detachment 101, a paramilitary OSS unit. They became his “wildcard,” attacking isolated enemy garrisons and supply lines to constantly attrite the Japanese in and around Myitkyina and to the south. The Detachment 101 commander, Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) William R. Peers, had wisely anticipated an expanded role in the campaign.

Since America’s strategy in WWII was to defeat Germany first, OSS operations in the Far East were a

low priority. OSS chief William J. Donovan intended Detachment 101 to be a strategic asset supporting conventional forces in north Burma, but the unit had been given little. Detachment 101 made do with whatever assets could be made available, even excess European operatives. LTC Peers was determined to undertake a program to fill the critical needs for NCAC when he assumed responsibility for “all operations which

- **OCT 1943** CHINESE FORCES BEGIN TO PUSH INTO THE UPPER HUKAWNG VALLEY
- **FEB-MAR 1944** THE MARAUDERS AND THE CHINDITS KICK OFF THEIR OFFENSIVE
- **MAR-APR 1944** THE MARAUDERS’ BATTLE OF NHPUM GA
- **MAY 1944** THE ALLIES TAKE THE MYITKYINA AIRFIELD, BUT THE CHINESE BLUNDER THE ATTACK ON THE TOWN
- **MAY-AUG 1944** SIEGE OF MYITKYINA

■ **MID-1943-1944** OSS DETACHMENT 101 FOCUSES ON INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION AND STARTS TO BUILD A GUERRILLA FORCE

SIDESHOW (TO NCAC)

- **FEB 1944** THE JAPANESE LAUNCH OPERATION HA-GO INTO THE ARAKAN; THE BRITISH DEFEAT THEM IN THE BATTLE OF THE ADMIN BOX
- **MAR-JUL 1944** THE JAPANESE LAUNCH OPERATION U-GO INTO THE KOHIMA-IMPHAL PLAIN; THE BRITISH DEFEAT THEM AFTER A BRUTAL STRUGGLE

ATTACK (1944)

JUL AUG SEPT OCT NOV DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG

[other units] are not prepared to undertake."⁵ Missions subsequently evolved rapidly.

Designed to operate deep in enemy territory, Detachment 101 transitioned during three phases of the campaign from its primary role of intelligence collection to guerrilla warfare. In Phase One, (mid-1943 to February 1944) OSS agents and teams infiltrated north Burma to gather enemy order of battle intelligence. During Phase Two (February to May 1944), Detachment 101 assumed a unconventional warfare (UW) role by recruiting, training, and employing guerrilla forces. By Phase Three (May to August 1944), guerrilla warfare had become Detachment 101's primary function. The tasks associated with intelligence collection enabled Detachment 101 to gradually build a GW capability.

The USAAF relied heavily on Detachment 101 for the majority of their targets: "101 reports usually concerned the enemy in movement or at an established location ... The latter usually led to immediate attack."⁶ They were the only source available to pinpoint the exact locations of enemy installations. The OSS teams also performed bomb damage assessments and manned mountaintop air warning stations. They radioed alerts on approaching Japanese aircraft and helped downed airmen escape and evade. The capture of the Myitkyina airfield prompted Detachment 101 to push deeper into Japanese-held areas.

LTC Peers wanted "to keep our units in positions where they can watch and report on every move of the enemy for our intelligence reports to air fighter and ground commands ... our information is now supplied to twenty-five military branches ... which otherwise could not get this intelligence."⁷ Terrain made rapid relocation exceedingly difficult. While their movements south and south-east were covered by the monsoon rains, air resupply was interrupted.

That impacted on recruiting indigenous personnel. From the beginning in north Burma, the OSS formed solid bonds with the fierce and pro-Allied indigenous Kachin tribesmen. At first, the Kachins were used as intelligence collectors and acted as guides/scouts for the conventional forces. They led the Marauders unseen to



U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander James C. Luce, commander of the FORWARD group (later Area #1) with some of Detachment 101's first Kachin recruits.

Unique Backgrounds



Second Lieutenants Charles Coussoule (L) and Daniel Mudrinich (R) in Cairo in 1943. Recruited by the OSS because of his Serbian background, Lieutenant Daniel Mudrinich was trained to operate with Royalist Dragoljub "Draža" Mihailović's Chetnicks in German-occupied Yugoslavia. While in Cairo, Egypt, Mudrinich found out that during the November 1943 Tehran Conference the U.S. and British decided to give all their support to Mihailović's rival, Communist Marshall Tito (Josip Broz), negating his ability to go into the field. Coussoule had been recruited by the OSS for operations in Greece.

the Myitkyina Airfield on 16 May 1944. Since the city had not been captured, the conventional Allied forces of NCAC had become decisively engaged with the Japanese. This strategic dilemma provided a tactical advantage to the Detachment 101 guerrilla forces. They could take greater chances and not face certain retaliation. Stalemated in late May/early June, LTG Stilwell told Peers to build a 10,000-man guerrilla force. The OSS recruited primarily from the Kachins, but also used the Gurkhas, Nagas, Karens, Shans, and Chinese. By the beginning of Phase Three, Detachment 101's GW campaign was beginning to pay off.

The elusive and field-wise Kachins enabled the OSS to turn the north Burma jungles against the Japanese. In June 1944, Major R.T. Shelby, the Detachment 101 operations section officer, reported that the move from purely intelligence collection to OG [Operational Group] operations was attributed to the large numbers of indigenous personnel recruited for guerrilla operations.⁸ As the guerrilla force grew, they kept the Japanese off balance by ambushing isolated garrisons, small enemy elements, supply convoys and depots, and blowing bridges and railroads to relieve pressure on the Allies at Myitkyina.

By June 1944, the OSS had some 3,300 newly-recruited guerrillas in five major groups headed by American or British advisors that were organized into five major groups. TRAMP, with roughly 650 guerrillas, was farthest to the west in the Chindwin River Valley. They were intercepting scattered enemy forces withdrawing from the failed Japanese offensives against the British at Imphal and Kohima.⁹ The 350 guerrillas of KNOTHEAD scouted the Hukawng Valley for Merrill's Marauders from February to April 1944. PAT's 400 guerrillas were infiltrating down the course of the Mogaung to Myitkyina railroad. Farthest to the south and in support of the Chindits, were 400 guerrillas with Group #10.¹⁰ FORWARD, with 1,500 guerrillas, was located east of Myitkyina near Sadon. They were attacking Japanese forces east and south of the city. As the guerrilla forces got larger Detachment 101's operations became more complex.

Anticipating an expanded role in the north Burma campaign, in July 1944 LTC Peers simplified the Detachment's command and control structure. He established three operational areas and decentralized field operations by pushing more responsibility down to the field commanders; FORWARD became "Area #1;" PAT, KNOTHEAD, and Group #10 Operation consolidated under "Area #2;" and TRAMP became "Area #3." The Detachment headquarters then pushed a tactical communications center forward to NCAC headquarters that then communicated directly with each Area commander. Before, groups and teams had contacted headquarters directly. By August 1944, the forward-based radio section at NCAC headquarters handled all traffic to



Captain Sherman "Pete" Joost, the Area #1 Commander, in his primitive headquarters. Before taking over Area #1, he had spent months in the field. In early March, Joost and several OSS Kachins had landed at the Chindit's BROADWAY operating base in a First Air Commando Group CG-4A Waco Glider to accompany the "Dah" Force, a column of seventy-five Chindits who were given the mission of recruiting Chinese guerrilla troops.

and from Detachment 101 headquarters at Nazira while the Area headquarters received the communications from the OSS elements in their sectors. At each level, radio operators determined which messages were forwarded to the higher level. If any Area station was

CPT Charles C. Stelle (in camouflage suit) and PVT Thomas J. Davis (to Stelle's left). Both commanded guerrilla elements in Detachment 101's Group #10, which was the OSS element assisting the British Chindits. These guerrilla forces became part of Area #2 after Detachment 101 consolidated its operational structure in July 1944 in response to an increasing guerrilla warfare role.





JAMBU BUM



Shaduzup

Ritpong

Nsopzup

Nhpum Ga

8410

Inkangahtawng

MOGAUNG VALLEY

KUMON

Lonkin



Kamaing



MYITKYINA



Mogoung



Namkwin

Indaw Chaung

Irrawaddy R

Mawlu

Area #3

Area #2

Area #1

OSS Detachment 101 in the Myitkyina Campaign June - August 1944

During the Myitkyina Campaign, Japanese and Allied [American, British, and Chinese] forces were locked in a bitter struggle. The American and Chinese conventional forces were stalemated at Japanese-held Myitkyina, while the British and Chinese forces to the south were facing intense opposition. This situation allowed Detachment 101 the flexibility to conduct an effective unconventional warfare campaign against the Japanese lines of communication. Detachment 101 targeted the rail line leading to Myitkyina and the Irrawaddy River and inflicted numerous casualties by ambushing the enemy throughout the area. By August 1944, the Japanese forces in north Burma were in retreat. Detachment 101 had raised thousands of guerrillas, and continued conducting a full-fledged guerrilla war in the American-led Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC) until the end of the war in north Burma in mid-1945. The areas of operations for NCAC and the British are shown in the smaller area map.





This hilly north Burma terrain is typical of the area in which 1LT Daniel Mudrinich was operating in the months prior to the siege of Myitkyina.



Daniel Mudrinich, was a 2LT when he arrived at the FORWARD group in early 1944. He initially served as the group's Executive Officer.

temporarily off-line while relocating, the forward section handled its message traffic until that Area's communications "center" was operational again.¹¹ The new areas of responsibility (AORs) and the emphasis on more

guerrilla operations meant that the OSS field operators were hard-pressed to accomplish Peers' new directives. The biggest problem they faced in relocating was the terrain—described as a "green hell"—and the monsoon.

North of Myitkyina are steep mountains—the foothills of the Himalayas with peaks as high as 7,000 feet—with few roads. Most movement was on foot. Before moving close to Myitkyina, 1LT Daniel Mudrinich, serving in FORWARD (Area #1), was in the high country. "We would wake up in the morning and there would be frost ... when we looked down, we could not see the ground. The clouds were below us ... We would get fogged in, particularly during the monsoon. They [the supply drop aircraft] could not even find us." He continued, "Sometimes, we would march our unit for twelve hours and cover eight miles ... it was one-step forward and two steps back." When he moved his troops closer to Myitkyina, they had new difficulties.

The annual monsoon, that lasted from June through September, and endemic diseases like scrub typhus, dysentery, and malaria were extreme challenges. Mudrinich recalled the monsoon as "terrible" because "we were always wet." Illness made it worse. Mudrinich



A Detachment 101 element on the move. Although on foot, the guerrilla units could be highly mobile using jungle trails that were often unknown to the Japanese.

A Detachment 101 officer and his Kachin junior officers instruct new recruits, Burma, 1944.





Kachins of OSS Area #1 cook rice over an open fire. Rice—supplemented with what was available—was a staple for American and indigenous soldiers in Detachment 101.



An OSS Area #1 headquarters in enemy-occupied territory as seen from the air. The firing range on the right was used to train indigenous recruits.

remembered, “We had a hell of a time ... almost all of us had malaria a number of times.” And, as if that were not enough, Mudrinich added that he had almost constant diarrhea and “during the monsoon, you were [always] covered with leeches.”¹² Getting enough food on the move during the monsoon was a major problem for the OSS units in mountainous terrain.

Relocating to their new AORs made air resupply difficult. Mudrinich described life when his group (FORWARD) was on the move, “We might miss two or three drops in a row, and it might be a month before we got a drop ... By that time our rice [their staple] was just about gone ... [and] was pretty bitter because it was already moldy.”¹⁸ Life in the field got pretty rank: “We were in the same clothes for weeks. We all smelled the same so it was livable ... In the rain it wasn’t so bad, [because] it would wash off,” said LT Mudrinich. The PETE Group solved their own supply problems.

In July/August 1944, the eighty-man PETE group commanded by Captain Peter K. Lutken was moving from the Area #3 AOR over a hundred miles to the south to target the Katha-Mogaung rail line in Area #2’s AOR. The inhospitable terrain made resupply almost impossible. Worried about supplies, Lutken decided to become self-sufficient. First, PETE organized its own transportation corps of captured elephants and bullocks to carry bulk supplies. Then SGT Edgar J. Buck, under the PETE Group, solved the food problem by attacking Japanese supply dumps.¹⁹ Still, to expand the guerrilla forces, the OSS had to be able to arm, equip, and feed new recruits.

To raise and prepare his force, Mudrinich “started with about forty men. We just put them through something like our basic training ... We taught them guerrilla tactics ... and would carry on their training even after we were formed and in action.”²⁰ The selection of leaders often was based

on who had pre-war experience in the British-led Burma Rifles and spoke at least some English. These veterans “had a fairly good training background ... A lot of our *Subedars* and *Jemedars* [Officers] and *Havildars* [Sergeants] knew weapons and a little bit about tactics,” said LT Mudrinich.²¹ However, communicating was a challenge.

The majority of Kachins did not speak English, and few Americans understood Jinghpaw, their local tongue. Interpreters, who often only had a basic understanding of English, were hired. Second Lieutenant (2LT) James R. Ward, leading a Kachin group, initially used “Kenny,” his Karen (different ethnic group) radio operator to communicate with the troops. “None of the Kachins spoke any English. I spoke no [Jinghpaw] or Burmese. Kenny would speak in Burmese to the Kachin leaders. They in turn would speak Kachin to their troops. This was a very round about way of trying to command an organization.”²² Ward started learning Jinghpaw because he could not take Kenny, his radio operator, with him on patrols or ambushes lest he be killed. When all else failed, Mudrinich used “a lot of hand motions” to get the message across.²³ Having limited tactical experience was not uniquely an indigenous problem.

Although OSS operatives were well-trained in their specialties, many learned “on the job.” When LT Mudrinich, an infantryman, arrived, he discovered that FORWARD’s M1919 machineguns were not used in the field because they jammed. “We did not have a single guy there in our American group who was an infantryman. For a long time the whole battalion went without machineguns because they were not trained on them and no one knew about the headspace.”²⁴ LT Mudrinich set the headspace on the light machineguns. This solved the problem and enabled the other OSS personnel to properly



Captain Peter K. Lutken commanded the PETE subsection of the TRAMP Group during the Myitkyina Campaign. Lutken was a member of the British-led “V-Force” before joining the OSS.

The Monsoon and Air Resupply



An OSS Area #1 group unpacks a supply drop for easier transportation in late 1944. The hills in the background give a good indication of the type of terrain over which the drop aircraft had to fly in order to deliver their cargo.



A Detachment 101 operated Stinson L-1 Vigilant. This one, nicknamed the "Burma Belle" has been fitted with floats to allow it to land on waterways.

The mission of the Detachment 101 field groups to raise thousands of guerrilla troops meant that the OSS in Nazira and Myitkyina had to supply, equip, and feed them. This required air resupply by Detachment 101 Air Drop personnel aboard USAAF aircraft or direct support from the "Red Ass Squadron," the Detachment's own air wing.

The Air Drop section prepared, loaded, and "kicked" supplies to Detachment 101 groups in enemy territory. Since C-47, C-46, and B-25 drop aircraft were the key to maintaining the Allied toehold at Myitkyina, Detachment 101 used every ploy with LTG Stilwell and the USAAF to get a fair share of aircraft during the monsoon. Detachment 101's need was compounded by LTG Stilwell's direction to expand the guerrilla force to 10,000 fighters. They dropped 251,500 pounds of supplies into the field in June, 310,000 pounds in July, and 850,000 pounds in August, 1944. Yet, at times even this was not sufficient. Groups could not delay movements just because the weather negated supply.

To help deal with contingencies, a forward Detachment 101 supply section was established at the Myitkyina airfield in June. Rather than have cargo planes return to their Dinjan, India airbase with full loads because bad weather precluded airdrops, the planes were unloaded at Myitkyina.¹³ That way, they could take advantage of opportune airlift to attempt other drops. This was important because the USAAF daily allotment of aircraft from Dinjan of aircraft for Detachment 101 was

2.3 plane loads of supplies.¹⁴ Opportune airlift from Myitkyina did not count toward the daily quota. But, life for the Air Drop section at Myitkyina was far from safe.

First Lieutenant Bernard M. Brophy, serving at the Myitkyina Air Drop Depot, remembered that a P-51 Mustang fighter crashed landed on top of a P-40 Warhawk. They got the pilots out, but the planes caught on fire, which then spread to the OSS warehouse. "There was ammunition going off all day ... next thing we knew half of our warehouse was gone!"¹⁵ When air resupply got critical, Detachment 101 sent its air wing to help out.

Unlike other OSS units, Detachment 101 had organic air assets. Its "Red Ass Squadron," eventually grew to include Stinson L-1 Vigilants, Piper Cubs (L-4 Grasshoppers), a De Havilland Gypsy Moth, Stinson L-5 Sentinels, a Noorduynd UC-64A Norseman, Stearman PT-17 "Kaydets," and a British Spitfire fighter.¹⁶ For most missions the squadron used the outdated L-1. The OSS preferred it because pilots could carry heavy loads, land and take off from rough, short airfields, and it was strongly-built. Red Ass pilots performed emergency supply drops, medical and prisoner of war extractions, couriered time-critical intelligence, observation, liaison, and the occasional light bombing mission. The Detachment 101 light planes usually landed on crude airstrips hacked out of the jungle, on river sandbars, or in open fields. In June 1944 they extracted forty-nine wounded Chindits from the Mogaung area.¹⁷

A Stinson L-5 Sentinel lands at an airfield in north Burma, 1944. Both the L-5 and L-4 Grasshopper were more common liaison aircraft than the Red Ass Squadron's preferred L-1 Vigilant.





LT James R. Ward (kneeling in M-42 jumpsuit) with a group of Kachin guerrillas in 1944.



1LT Daniel Mudrinich instructs Kachin recruits in the use of the .30 M1 carbine. Notice the thick jungle scrub which is common in north Burma.



A Detachment 101-trained indigenous radio operator contacts headquarters in 1944, while another guerrilla turns a crank to supply power. Many of the radio operators had little to no English language skills but were very efficient in sending and receiving Morse Code messages.



A group of Kachins with a parachute-qualified OSS officer somewhere in Burma 1944-45. The group displays the variety of weapons that was prevalent in Detachment 101's guerrilla elements. They are armed with U.S. .30 M1 rifles and carbines, a .45 Thompson submachine gun, and a British .303 Bren light machinegun.

maintain the weapon. Commanders in the field also had to use common-sense.

The field leaders decided how their guerrillas would be armed. A large variety of American and British weapons were available. "The guy in the field had a hell of a lot of power placed on him ... do what you think makes sense," summed up Mudrinich when he described the guidance given him.²⁵ 2LT Ward, in Area #2, explained his criteria for arming his Kachins: "They were strong but not very tall ... the carbine [M1] was an easy size for them to carry, but it didn't have the stopping power. The Garand had much more range and stopping power, but it was very heavy and big."²⁶ Ward armed most of his troops with the .45 caliber M1A1 Thompson sub-machinegun. While heavy, its stopping power, ease

of use, compactness, and heavy volume of fire was great for ambushes, Detachment 101's specialty.

Hit and run tactics favored the recruits in training, often on their first combat operations. After positioning themselves at the best place along the road to cripple enemy movement, they waited for the Japanese.²⁹ The Kachins "would open up with everything they had, but for only five or ten minutes ... this was our normal way of fighting," said Mudrinich.³⁰ Then, they would scatter and regroup elsewhere.

Several ambushes and raids a week became standard practice. With Myitkyina under siege, FORWARD managed to drive the Japanese from outlying towns and prevented them from joining the city's garrison. Roads and trails leading into Myitkyina and further south were constantly covered. Japanese forces became very frustrated and paranoid. The main avenue of approach, however, was the Irrawaddy River, on the east side of Myitkyina flowing south. This was the primary Japanese

Cultural Awareness



LTC William R. Peers confers with OSS Chief Major General William "Wild Bill" Donovan in early 1945.

U.S. Navy surgeon Lieutenant Commander James C. Luce commanded the FORWARD group until he went back to Detachment 101 headquarters at Nazira, India to establish a hospital. Luce had been wounded on 7 December 1941 at Pearl Harbor while serving aboard the U.S.S. Maryland.

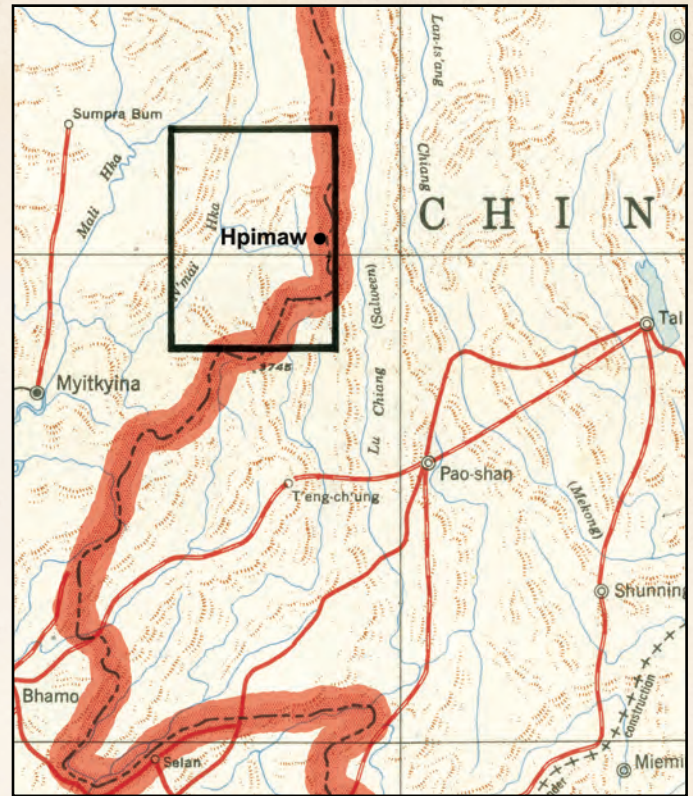


Cultural awareness was just as important in World War II as it is today. "The Kachins didn't have the same sense of [time] that we did. We [measure] everything we do in hours, minutes, days, and weeks. To the Kachins, there are just days ... there are only two seasons ... a rainy season and a dry season. That is all," said 2LT Ward. "The Kachins weren't in a hurry to get the war over with ... this war had been going on for years ... for us to be pushing every single day was ridiculous to them."²⁷ Problems at home occasionally took precedence over fighting the Japanese.

Although Kachin guerrillas were paid, there was no formal contract, nor a serious way to discipline adverse behavior. They served of their own volition and

evacuation route for their wounded and for resupply.

The FORWARD guerrillas set up ambushes along the Irrawaddy close to Myitkyina while other OSS groups established river blocks to the south. Mudrinich and 200 guerrillas occupied a favorite position below Myitkyina for nearly two months. The Japanese tried to escape Myitkyina "on camouflaged rafts ... anytime we saw any movement ... we shot it up if we could."³¹ Bodies were recovered downstream and searched for intelligence. LTC Peers told OSS chief Donovan that the enemy was "like clay pigeons for our marksmen on the banks."³² LTG Stilwell was impressed. Even his 21 July 1944 diary entry read, "indications are now that we have the noose [around Myitkyina] good and tight and that few will get away."³³ As the Detachment 101 elements around Myitkyina tore



Location of the Maru uprising along the Burma/China border.

occasionally deserted. When Japanese troops withdrew from the China-Burma border town of Hpimaw to support Myitkyina, Chinese troops occupied the area in June 1944. Under FORWARD were numerous Maru troops, a Kachin sub-tribe, who learned that the Chinese were looting their villages. FORWARD's commander, U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander James C. Luce, started moving to the south as ordered by LTC Peers. During the first day's march south, 110 Marus deserted, taking their weapons and equipment. These Marus waged war against the Chinese for three weeks. Though the Chinese reported seventy-five of their troops killed, OSS intelligence reports placed the number closer to 400.²⁸

up the Japanese escape routes, NCAC forces in the south sealed their fate.

The OSS guerrillas in Area #2 had been protecting the flanks of the worn-down Chindits who were pressing the attack on Mogaung.³⁴ After getting a message from the Chindits that they would leave if Chinese troops did not arrive in two days, OSS Agent "Skittles," (Harry Hengshoon) and his Kachins led the 114th Regiment of the 38th Chinese Division around the flank to encircle Mogaung and link-up with the Chindits.³⁵ It would not have been accomplished without the OSS liaison personnel that were in contact with each group. The two forces took the town on 26 June 1944, severing one of the last remaining Japanese links to supply, reinforcement, and relief to their forces in the north.³⁶ Still, the Japanese

defenders in Myitkyina held on for another month.

The Detachment 101 guerrillas had to increase their efforts. They began patrolling the length of the Mogaung-Myitkyina rail line.³⁷ 1LT Ted U. Barnes in Area #2 was mopping up Japanese stragglers who were "badly organized, badly equipped, and trying to get through to the south."³⁸ OSS elements continued to hammer the Japanese. The Irrawaddy became a shooting gallery. Under increased pressure, the Japanese position in north Burma unraveled.

On 3 August 1944 Chinese troops discovered that Myitkyina had been abandoned.³⁹ Wounded that could not be moved were left behind and a small rear guard covered the retreat. The combination of conventional and unconventional warfare had finally attrited the Japanese. The OSS guerrillas continued to harass the Japanese forces fleeing north Burma. Even Detachment 101's Air Drop section got in the action. First Lieutenant Bernard M. Brophy, manning the OSS supply at Myitkyina, occasionally went on supply drops to groups south of the city. He recalled that on the return flights, the pilots would often fly low to the ground. The OSS "kickers" kept a watch out the open door for a chance to use the cache of grenades that they always carried on such flights for "the off chance that we spotted something." If they spotted an enemy-manned raft on the Irrawaddy or a Japanese patrol, they would toss out a few grenades. He said, "We never knew if we hit anything or not ... there was no real rhyme or reason for it, just a chance to do something."⁴⁰ LT Mudrinich added, "they were so beat up. It was kind of a miracle that any of them got out and got home again."⁴¹ With Myitkyina finally in Allied hands, the conventional forces stopped to rest. Detachment 101 could not because LTG Stilwell was planning the next offensive.

Detachment 101 was the only American or British ground force that participated in the Myitkyina Campaign

Harry Hengshoon, AKA "Skittles," was a Burmese national of Chinese descent. He spoke several languages fluently, including Chinese, Burmese, and English. He was one of the top agents employed by Detachment 101.



to remain intact afterwards. The Marauders and the Chindits had been rendered ineffective, mostly by disease. The remaining Marauders still on their feet became the cadre of the 475th Infantry Regiment, one of two in the 5332nd Brigade (Provisional), known as the MARS Task Force. The Chindits never returned to the field and were disbanded in February 1945. The war was over for them, but not for Detachment 101.

The OSS guerrilla units continued to intercept Japanese elements fleeing south, preventing them from regrouping, refitting, and being able to stand against the Allied drive after the monsoon stopped. In August 1944, the Detachment added several hundred more Japanese killed to their accomplishments. The reality was that the OSS guerrillas were the only Allied element maintaining contact with the Japanese south of Myitkyina until 15 October 1944, when NCAC resumed its offensive.⁴² The OSS had proved itself to be an extremely capable "wild card" maneuver force.

Securing Myitkyina ended Japanese domination of north Burma. The Allies could use the city as a supply depot for the Ledo Road and its airfield supported operations in lower Burma. Because cargo planes no longer had to

Soldiers of Merrill's Marauders take a well-earned break away from the battle of Myitkyina on 2 August 1944. The Japanese positions were about 75 yards away.





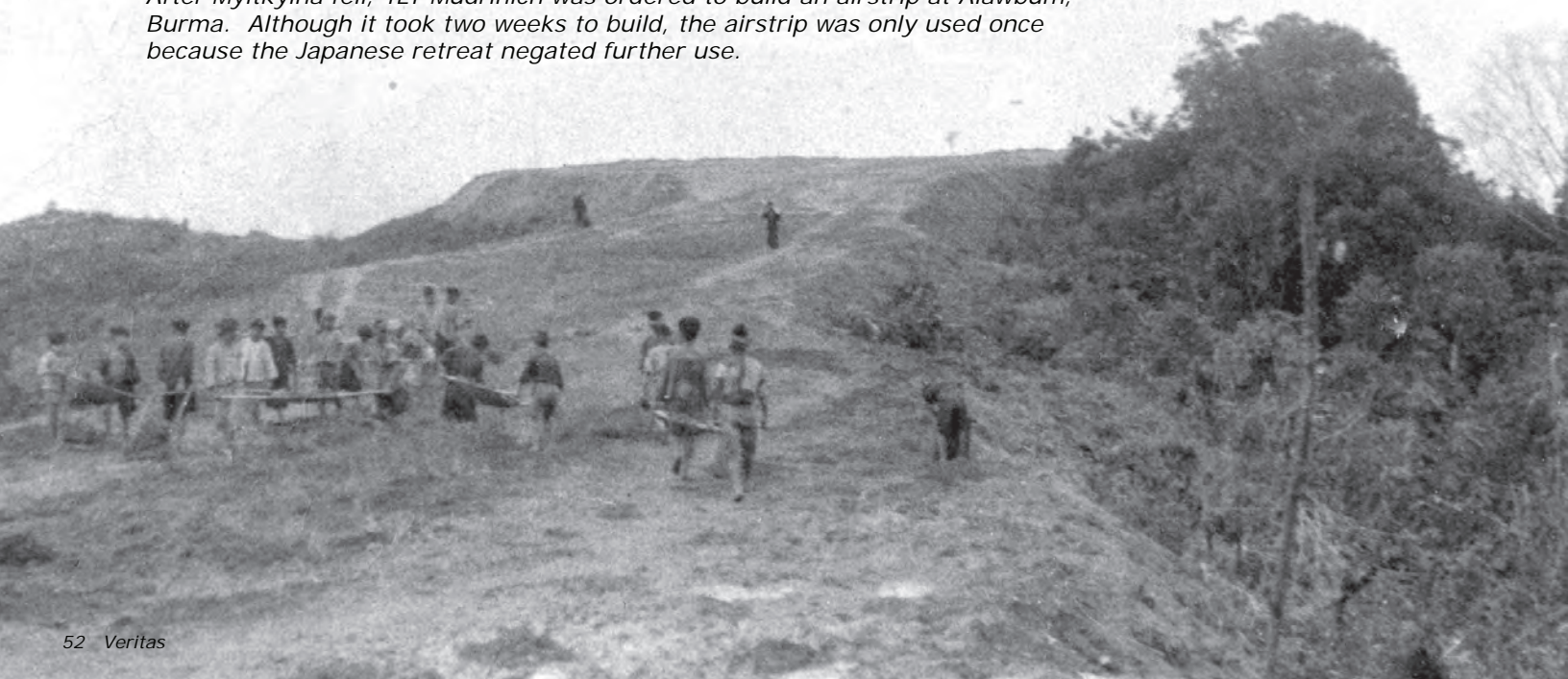
Area #1 officers pose in the field, late 1944. On the left standing is CPT Sherman "Pete" Joost, 1LT Danny Mudrinich, Father MacAllindon (an Irish Catholic priest who was assisting the OSS), U.S. Navy Pharmacist Mate Lysle E. Wilson, and standing on the far right, 1LT Joseph E. Lazarsky, (kneeling unknown).

fly the original "Hump" route to avoid Japanese fighter aircraft based there, the tonnage increased from 13,000 tons a month in May 1944 to nearly 40,000 by November 1944.⁴³ Strategically, Detachment 101 had a major impact, but theirs was an economy of force effort.

There were only some 90 Americans and British in the field with the guerrilla forces.⁴⁴ At the end of August 1944, Area #1 had five American and three British officers and fourteen American and three British enlisted men working with the units.⁴⁵ The OSS had been a force-multiplier because its guerrillas tied up thousands of

Japanese in north Burma and had severely attrited the enemy in an around Myitkyina.⁴⁶ The intelligence flow to the USAAF never ceased. Major General Howard Davidson, 10th USAAF, commended the unit in August 1944 for providing the bulk of the intelligence used by his unit throughout the campaign.⁴⁷ It was truly Detachment 101 that tipped the balance in favor of the Allies in north Burma. LTC Ray Peers had transformed the unit into the strategic theater asset envisioned by OSS director William Donovan when he sent the group to Burma in 1942. ♣

After Myitkyina fell, 1LT Mudrinich was ordered to build an airstrip at Alawbum, Burma. Although it took two weeks to build, the airstrip was only used once because the Japanese retreat negated further use.



I wish to thank Mrs. Marje Luce and Detachment 101 veterans Bernard Brophy and Peter Lutken for their assistance. In particular, I wish to express my gratitude to the family of Danny Mudrinich, who spent many hours discussing the campaign with me but passed away before he could see the article's completion.

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Endnotes

- 1 The role of Detachment 101 leading to the 17 May 1944 capture of the Myitkyina airfield was presented in "A Special Forces Model: Detachment 101 in the Myitkyina Campaign, Part I" by Troy J. Sacquety, in *Veritas* 1: 2008
- 2 William Slim, *Defeat Into Victory: Battling Japan in Burma and India, 1942-1945* (New York, NY: Copper Square Press, 2000), 280.
- 3 Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *United States Army in World War II: China-Burma-India Theater: Stilwell's Command Problems* (Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, 1987, 232.
- 4 Brigadier General Bernard E. Fergusson's 16th Infantry Brigade (3,000 men) began a 360-mile march to their operating area on 5 February 1944. For more on the LRPGs, see "Allied Long Range Penetration Groups for Burma: The Chindits, the Marauders, and the MARS Task Force," by Troy J. Sacquety, in *Veritas* 1: 2008.
- 5 William R. Peers to William J. Donovan, "Report Covering period 31 May to 30 June, 1944," [30 June 1944], F 13, B 34, E 190, RG 226, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).
- 6 LTC Emile Z. Berman, "Special Report on Activities of Detachment 101 O.S.S. in Relation to Air Force Action in North Burma," 11 September 1944, F 16, B 34, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 7 Peers to Donovan, "Report Covering period 31 May," [30 June 1944], NARA.
- 8 Peers to Donovan, "Report Covering period 31 May," [30 June 1944], NARA. The OSS OGs organized, trained, and equipped resistance organizations, conducted "hit and run" missions against enemy-controlled roads, railways, and strong points, or prevented their destruction by retreating enemy forces. OG teams operated in Italy, France, Yugoslav Islands, Greece, Burma, and China.
- 9 Operation TRAMP, formed out of the RED group under Pat Maddox, had been augmented in April by the DOW and PETE groups (named after their commanders) and composed of Americans that had been in V-Force, a British-led intelligence unit. The V-Force personnel were extremely valuable to Detachment 101 and brought with them a wealth of experience on the operating environment. Several had learned to speak Kachin, and were well-respected by the local population.
- 10 William R. Peers and Dean Brelis, *Behind the Burma Road: The Story of America's Most Successful Guerrilla Force* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), 137-139. Peers to Donovan, "Report Covering period 31 May," [30 June 1944], NARA.
- 11 William R. Peers to William J. Donovan, "Report covering period 30 June to 31 July, 1944," [31 July 1944], F 14, B 34, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 12 Daniel Mudrinich, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 11 April 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 13 Peers to Donovan, "Report Covering period 31 May," [30 June 1944], NARA.
- 14 Peers to Donovan, "Report covering period 30 June," [late July 1944], NARA. The Detachment 101 quota of aircraft was insignificant compared to that necessary to hold Myitkyina's airfield.
- 15 Bernard M. Brophy, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 25 August 2008, Fort Bragg, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 16 Vince Trifletti, "Rocky Reardon's Airforce," *101 Association Incorporated*, April 1975, 3-5.
- 17 Peers to Donovan, "Report Covering period 31 May," [30 June 1944], NARA.
- 18 Mudrinich interview, 11 April 2008.
- 19 Peter K. Lutken, telephone interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 2 July 2007, Fort Bragg, NC, notes. Also see Reginald Thorlin, "Pete Group," 28 August 1944, F 439, B 64, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 20 Mudrinich interview, 11 April 2008.
- 21 Mudrinich interview, 11 April 2008. Detachment 101 used the Burma Rifle's ranks from the pre-war British Indian Army.
- 22 James R. Ward, interviewed by COL Larry A. Hoff, 1989, 16-18, draft manuscript in author's possession.
- 23 Daniel Mudrinich, interview by Dr. Troy J. Sacquety, 20 May 2008, Seminole, FL, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 24 Mudrinich interview, 11 April 2008.
- 25 Mudrinich interview, 20 May 2008.
- 26 Ward, interview, 24-25.
- 27 Ward interview, 49-50.
- 28 James C. Luce, see "Report on Tour of Duty With Office of Strategic Services Detachment 101: North Burma and Assam, November 1, 1943 to April 1, 1945," [April 1945], original in author's possession; "Interview with Maj. Drown," 16 May 1945, F 46, B 38, E 190, RG 226, NARA. Relations with the Chinese troops were so poor that members of Detachment 101 were given a standing order that they were to keep themselves and their troops well away from them unless a specific liaison task was given.
- 29 Mudrinich interview, 20 May 2008.
- 30 Mudrinich interview, 11 April 2008.
- 31 Mudrinich interview, 11 April 2008.
- 32 William R. Peers to William J. Donovan, "Report covering period 31 July to 31 August, 1944," [31 August], F 15, B 34, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 33 Joseph W. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1948), 307.
- 34 [Interview of Ted Barnes], 1 December 1944, F 78, B 43, E 190, RG 226, NARA. One of the screening groups was the DAVIS group. It armed Kachin villagers to serve as militia and agents, and organized local labor to build airstrips and be stretcher-bearers. These Kachins served as the nucleus for new groups. See Thomas J. Davis to Opero, radio message 22, 23 June 1944, F 415, B 28, E 154, RG 226, NARA., and Thomas J. Davis to Operations, "Report of Field Operations for Period April 7," [July 1944], NARA.
- 35 "Harry S. Hengshoon (Skittles)," [May 1945?], F 46, B 38, E 190, RG 226, NARA. The Chindits did most of the fighting for Mogaung, but Stilwell gave the Chinese the credit for taking it. Chindit Brigadier General James "Mad Mike" Calvert signaled in protest; "The Chinese having taken Mogaung 77 Brigade is proceeding to take Umbrage". See Shelford Bidwell, *The Chindit War: Stilwell, Wingate, and the Campaign in Burma, 1944* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 274.
- 36 In fact, a Japanese Regimental Combat Team of the 53rd Division had been under way to relieve Myitkyina, but was turned back by the Allied advance on Mogaung.
- 37 Peers to Donovan, "Report covering period 30 June," [31 July 1944], NARA.
- 38 [Interview of Ted Barnes], 1 December 1944, F 78, B 43, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 39 Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 233-236.
- 40 Brophy interview, 25 August 2008.
- 41 Mudrinich interview, 20 May 2008.
- 42 William R. Peers to William J. Donovan, "Report Covering Period 30 September to 31 October, 1944," [1 November 1944], F 17, B 34, E 190, RG 226, NARA.
- 43 Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Command Problems*, 112, 254.
- 44 Peers to Donovan, "Report covering period 31 July," [31 August 1944], NARA.
- 45 Peers to William J. Donovan, "Report covering period 31 July" [31 August], NARA.
- 46 Robert Rodenberg to William R. Peers, "Casualties of Detachment 101 Personnel," 31 August 1944, F 209A, B 26, E 165, RG 226, NARA. From 1942 until August 1944, Detachment 101 killed nearly 2000 Japanese, more than half of which occurred from May-August 1944. According to "KNOTHEAD GROUP," F 48, B 38, E 190, RG 226, NARA, Japanese dead were only counted if a body was seen, or if a Japanese soldier was observed to fall after being shot.
- 47 Peers to Donovan, "Report covering period 31 July," [31 August 1944], NARA. See Howard Davidson to William J. Donovan, "Contribution of Detachment 101, OSS, to USAAF in Northeastern Assam and North Burma," 1 August 1944.