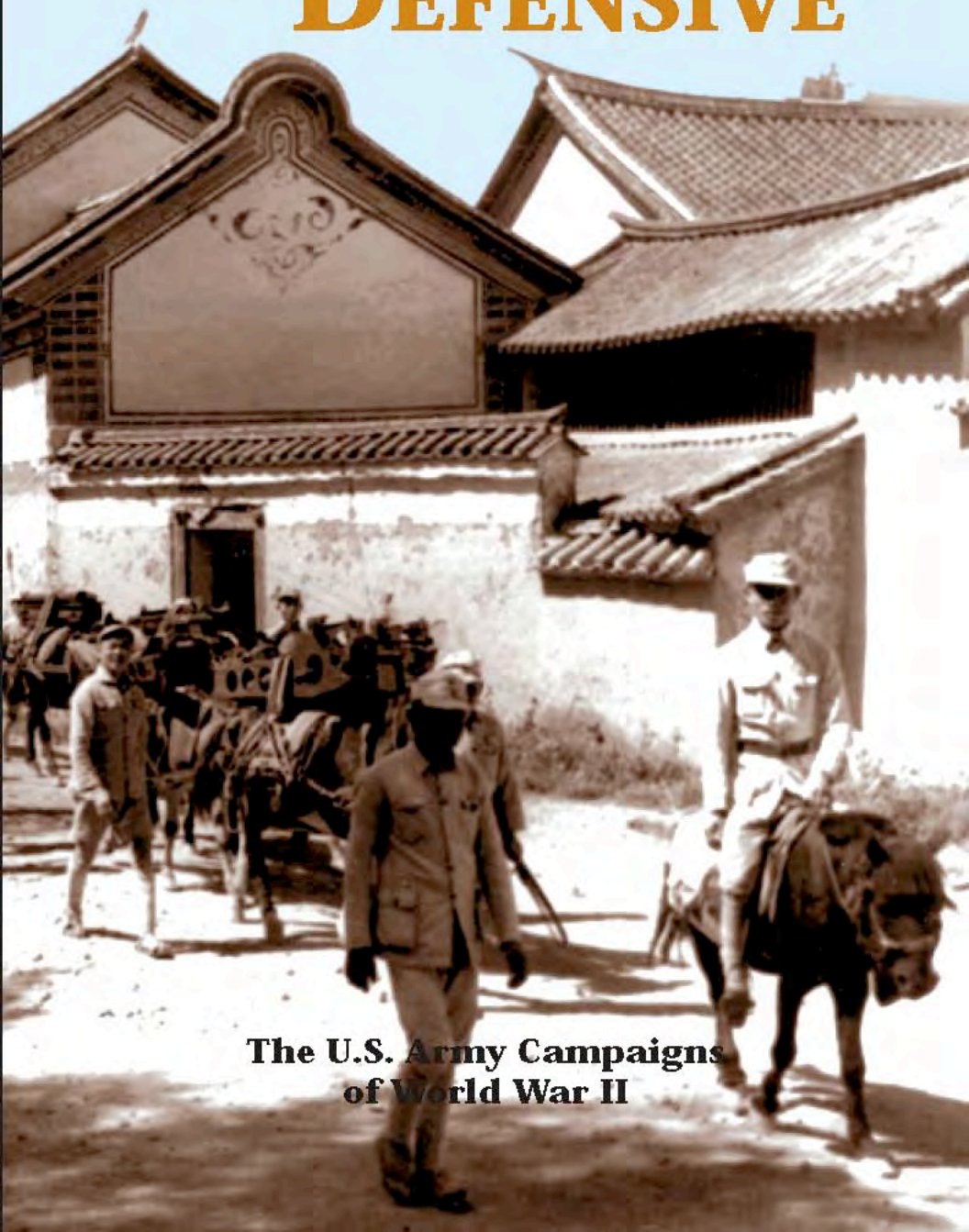


CHINA DEFENSIVE



**The U.S. Army Campaigns
of World War II**

Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. To commemorate the nation's 50th anniversary of World War II, the U.S. Army has published a variety of materials to help educate Americans about that momentous experience. These works provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Mark D. Sherry. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

JOHN W. MOUNTCASTLE
Brigadier General, USA
Chief of Military History

China Defensive

4 July 1942–4 May 1945

The China Theater of Operations more resembled the Soviet-German war on the Eastern Front than the war in the Pacific or the war in Western Europe. On the Asian continent, as on the Eastern Front, an Allied partner, China, carried the brunt of the fighting. China had been at war with Japan since 1937 and continued the fight until the Japanese surrender in 1945. The United States advised and supported China's ground war, while basing only a few of its own units in China for operations against Japanese forces in the region and Japan itself. The primary American goal was to keep the Chinese actively in the Allied war camp, thereby tying down Japanese forces that otherwise might be deployed against the Allies fighting in the Pacific.

The United States confronted two fundamental challenges in the China theater. The first challenge was political. Despite facing a common foe in Japan, Chinese society was polarized. Some Chinese were supporters of the Nationalist Kuomintang government; some supported one of the numerous former warlords nominally loyal to the Nationalists; and some supported the Communists, who were engaged in a guerrilla war against the military and political forces of the Nationalists. Continuing tensions, which sometimes broke out into pitched battles, precluded development of a truly unified Chinese war effort against the Japanese.

The second challenge in the China theater was logistical. Fighting a two-front war of its own, simultaneously having to supply other Allies, and facing enormous distances involved in moving anything from the United States to China, the U.S. military could not sustain the logistics effort required to build a modern Chinese army. Without sufficient arms, ammunition, and equipment, let alone doctrine and leadership training, the Chinese Nationalist Army was incapable of driving out the Japanese invaders. A "Europe-first" U.S. policy automatically lowered the priority of China for U.S.-manufactured arms behind the needs of U.S. forces, of other European Allies, and of the Soviet Union. The China theater was also the most remote from the United States. American supplies and equipment had to endure long sea passages to India for transshipment to China, primarily by airlift. But transports bringing supplies to China had to fly over the Himalayas—the so-called Hump—whose treacherous air currents and rugged

mountains claimed the lives of many American air crews. Despite a backbreaking effort, only a fraction of the supplies necessary to successfully wage a war ever reached southern China.

Regardless of these handicaps, the United States and Nationalist China succeeded in forging a coalition that withstood the tests of time. Indeed, Chinese leader Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the Allied Supreme Commander, China Theater, accepted, though reluctantly, U.S. Army generals as his chiefs of staff. This command relationship also endured differences in national war aims and cultures, as well as personalities, until the end of the war. The original policies of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall succeeded—China stayed in the war and prevented sizable numbers of Japanese troops from deploying to the Pacific.

Strategic Setting

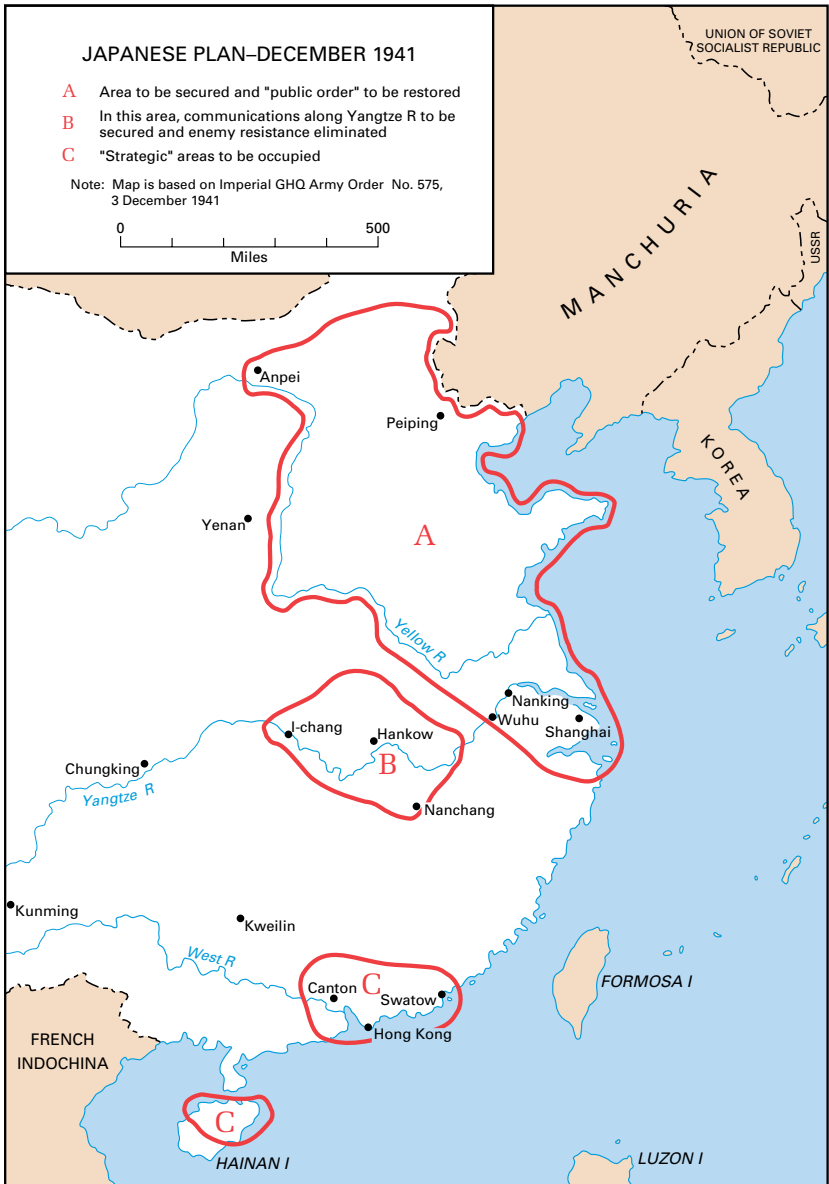
China's estimated 400 million people seemed to offer the Allies a great military asset in terms of inexhaustible manpower. Emerging from a century of defeat and humiliation at the hands of European powers and Japan, plus years of civil wars, China in the early 1900s appeared to be moving slowly toward restoring its national sovereignty. By the late 1920s, the Chinese government had gained at least nominal control over most of the country and embarked on a path of reform and modernization, with advice and support from selected foreign governments and individuals. Japan's undeclared war in China in 1937 gained popular sympathy and respect for the Chinese from the international community. By 1941, for a variety of reasons ranging from noble political idealism to crude anti-Japanese sentiment, the West was again ready to support China.

One key recipient of this support was the Chinese Nationalist Army. Despite Chiang's apparent unification of China by military force, his army incorporated many units more loyal to their former regional warlords than to his new central government. Nationalist Army units were not only uneven in loyalty but also in quality. On paper China had 3.8 million men under arms in 1941. They were organized into 246 "front-line" divisions, with another 70 divisions assigned to rear areas. Perhaps as many as forty Chinese divisions had been equipped with European-manufactured weapons and trained by foreign, particularly German and Soviet, advisers. The rest of the units were under strength and generally untrained. Overall, the Nationalist Army impressed most Western military observers as more reminiscent of a nineteenth- than a twentieth-century army.

JAPANESE PLAN-DECEMBER 1941

- A** Area to be secured and "public order" to be restored
- B** In this area, communications along Yangtze R to be secured and enemy resistance eliminated
- C** "Strategic" areas to be occupied

Note: Map is based on Imperial GHQ Army Order No. 575, 3 December 1941



Full-scale war with Japan began in July 1937. Although quickly defeated in north China, stubborn Chinese resistance in Shanghai later that year earned them worldwide respect. But Japan's highly trained soldiers proved too much for the Chinese. Driven from Shanghai, the Chinese retreated inland. Nanking, the Nationalist capital, fell to the Japanese in December 1937. Yet China refused Japan's peace overtures and withdrew still deeper into the rugged interior, finally reestablishing a capital at Chungking, on the upper Yangtze gorges some 700 miles from the coast.

Chiang's army received \$250 million worth of tanks, trucks, and aircraft from the Soviet Union in 1938, plus some British and French military supplies. Nevertheless, by the summer of 1939 Japan controlled most of northeastern China and all major coastal seaports, except for the British Crown Colony at Hong Kong. In short, China was isolated, except for supplies moving from the west along the so-called Burma Road or through French Indochina.

Joining in widespread international condemnation of Japan's aggression, the United States circumspectly supported China. President Roosevelt approved \$25 million in military aid to China on 19 December 1940, permitting the Chinese to purchase one hundred P-40 pursuit aircraft. By late spring 1941, the United States had also earmarked over \$145 million in lend-lease funds for China to acquire both ground and air equipment. In May 1941, Secretary of War Henry Stimson approved a Chinese request for sufficient equipment to outfit thirty infantry divisions, intended for delivery by mid-1942. Prompted by his private adviser, Claire L. Chennault, a retired U.S. Army Air Corps officer, Chiang also obtained Roosevelt's support for an American Volunteer Group (AVG) of about one hundred U.S. civilian volunteers to fly the one hundred recently purchased P-40s. These "Flying Tigers" began arriving in Burma in late 1941, the first Americans actually to be fighting alongside the Chinese.

Having responded to disparate Chinese requests for specific arms, General Marshall moved quickly to ensure tighter coordination between Chinese requirements and U.S. production plans. He established the American Military Mission to China (AMMISCA) on 3 July 1941 under Brig. Gen. John Magruder, an officer with previous China experience. Rather than simply serve as a conduit for Nationalist requests for supplies, Marshall directed Magruder to advise the Chinese on their military needs and ensure a closer match between those needs and the capabilities of U.S. defense production.

Still, China had a lower priority for supplies than the United States and its European Allies. Even the relatively meager amount of

materiel required by the Chinese proved difficult to deliver. Japanese control of the China coast meant that all supplies had to reach inland China through either Burma or French Indochina. British reluctance to provoke Japan limited shipments through Hong Kong, and French acquiescence to Japanese occupation of northern Indochina in September 1940 left Rangoon, Burma, the closest friendly port to Nationalist-held areas in China. Having crossed nearly 14,000 miles by sea, lend-lease aid next went by rail to Lashio in northern Burma, and then 715 miles by truck over the Burma Road to Kunming, China. Over this precarious route only a trickle of supplies arrived at Kunming. Burma's loss to Japan's armies in late May 1942 cut this one remaining overland resupply route. The closest port for Chiang was now in India, and henceforth all supplies earmarked for China had to travel by air over the Himalayas, the Hump.

Despite these hardships, the U.S. government established a military theater of operations in China soon after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought America into the war. President Roosevelt appointed Army Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell head of the U.S. China-Burma-India theater, and at the combined level, Generalissimo Chiang appointed him chief of staff of the combined forces in the theater. Arriving in China in early March, Stilwell found himself in a military and political quagmire.

From the beginning of his tenure, Stilwell was dismayed by the overall Chinese war effort. Many officers had noted that only a small minority of Nationalist divisions were personally loyal to Chiang. Most of the others reserved their allegiance for their own commanders, whose subordination to Nationalist authority was problematic. Moreover, most commanders viewed their units as political as well as military resources and fought accordingly. Their intention was to conserve manpower and equipment rather than defeat the Japanese. Not surprisingly, U.S. observers considered the Nationalist Army excessively defensive-minded, and were further dismayed by Chiang's insistence that several of his best units deploy to northwestern China to blockade the Chinese Communist forces in Yen-an. Although both Nationalists and Communists had pledged a united front against Japan, this precarious truce broke down in mid-1941. Civil war, it often seemed, was more likely than joint military action.

Stilwell's immediate problem was the Japanese threat to China's supply lines in Burma. Chiang deployed nine Chinese divisions from Yunnan Province, including several of his top units, equipped with the first lend-lease supplies, to defend Burma. But even Stilwell's personal leadership of that force could not stanch the Japanese tide. Stilwell and

the Chinese force retreated to India where he laid plans for retraining the Chinese Army for sustained offensive operations to retake Burma and take the offensive in China itself.

Operations

Stilwell's first instinct in the China theater was to seize the initiative, so June 1942 found him proposing a counteroffensive to push the Japanese back down the Yangtze valley toward Hankow. Perhaps of more immediate import, Stilwell was also proposing lifting the blockade of China by recapturing Burma, and possibly even northern Indochina, through a multifront offensive employing Nationalist units in southern China and those Chinese units operating together with British forces from India. The fact that the latter units could be directly supported by British ports in India made this second project particularly attractive. Stilwell reasoned that a simultaneous advance from both the west and east against the north-south portion of the Burma Road held by the Japanese would be difficult to counter, and that restoration of the China land supply route would make possible the other projects seemingly desired by both Chiang and Stilwell. The logic of the campaign seemed simple to American planners, but in China nothing was simple.

Chiang supported neither offensive. Emphasizing the under-equipped condition of most Chinese divisions, the Generalissimo argued successfully that army resupply and training must precede any major operations against Japanese forces in China. He bristled at the concept of using Chinese divisions to restore Burma to British Imperial control and may have also feared that his American-advised and -equipped troops in India would become yet another independent army. Moreover, although Stilwell had requested that at least one American division be committed to the Allied campaign in Burma, no U.S. forces were made available, greatly reducing American leverage.

Chiang also questioned the level of lend-lease supplies and their transportation to China itself. U.S. and Chinese leaders had agreed that the Thirty Division plan, approved in 1941, and aid for building a 500-plane Chinese air force, would require delivery of at least 7,500 tons of supplies per month. Because of production problems in the United States, however, the War Department was able to forward only 3,500 tons per month to China through most of the rest of 1942. Although it approved an additional 1,500 tons per month to U.S. air units in China, for a monthly goal of 5,000 tons, even this supplement was unrealized.



Engineers unload a bulldozer from an Allied transport plane.
(U.S. Army Military History Institute)

Equally significant, the Allies lacked the airlift capability to move the supplies over the Hump. Although the Chinese estimated that seventy-five C-47 transports could fly 5,000 tons per month, the CBI theater's Air Transport Command had only fifty-seven aircraft in May 1942. Partly because of inclement weather, these planes averaged only fifty-seven round trips between China and India during the months of May and June, delivering a total of 186 tons for both months. Consequently, supplies intended for the Chinese accumulat-

ed in India awaiting airlift to China. But when Stilwell argued for using these backlogged supplies to outfit Chinese units for a Burma campaign, Chiang felt the Americans were again trying to bypass his orders to further their own enterprises.

The shortages of delivery over the Hump caused another dilemma for Stilwell. The AVG's success in Burma and China led to its integration into the U.S. Army Air Forces on 6 July 1942 as the China Air Task Force. Claire Chennault, recalled to active duty as a brigadier general, commanded the new unit. Enjoying a warm personal relationship with Chiang, Chennault planned for offensive air operations from bases in China against Japanese ground, air, and naval targets throughout China and Southeast Asia. To carry out his plans, Chennault needed nearly 2,000 tons a month of supplies, virtually all of the imported Hump tonnage. Although Stilwell forwarded Chennault's request to Chiang in September 1942, he recommended against it because the diversion of supplies would endanger his higher priority Thirty Division plan.

The conflict between the priorities of Stilwell and those of Chennault set the stage for another major dispute over theater strategy. The U.S. inability to meet lend-lease requirements afforded Chiang considerable leverage in his inclination to side with Chennault. Unwilling to see his remaining forces decimated in premature combat operations, he also proved wary of many of Stilwell's reform ideas. Similarly, not only was the United States unable to provide the infantry division Stilwell had requested, but American advisory personnel for China amounted to only 1,255 men by the end of the year, with all but 250 of those being Air Forces personnel. This aid was far below Chiang's expectations.

It took Roosevelt's personal envoy, Dr. Lauchlin Currie, to broker a compromise. Acquiescing to Stilwell's proposals on 1 August 1942, Chiang agreed to a campaign in Burma at an unspecified date involving as many as 20 Chinese divisions, including 15 operating from Yunnan Province in southern China and 2 from India. The latter would be trained at a U.S.-run base at Ramgarh, India—a victory for Stilwell. In exchange, Chiang held out for one U.S. division, 500 aircraft for the Chinese air force, and 5,000 tons of supplies per month airlifted over the Hump.

Thrusting himself headlong into planning for a major Burma campaign in the spring of 1943, Stilwell spent the remainder of 1942 training Chinese forces in India and trying to obtain operational control of the fifteen Chinese divisions in Yunnan, designated the "Y-Force." Accelerated shipments of supplies for the Y-Force, however, could



American trainer explains a tactical situation to Chinese soldiers. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

only come at the expense of supplies for Chennault, who campaigned through both official and unofficial channels for continued logistical support for his needs. Capitalizing on the discord between two of his American advisers, the Generalissimo sided with Chennault, recognizing that the lack of supplies for the Y-Force would compel Stilwell to table his ambitious plan.

Meanwhile, the ground war in China remained stalemated. In May 1942 the raid on Japan by Brig. Gen. James H. Doolittle's carrier-launched medium bombers sparked a punitive campaign by six divisions of the *Japanese Eleventh Army* and *Thirteenth Army* against Nationalist airfields in Chekiang Province. Although none of Doolittle's twin-engine bombers from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* ever



Smashed railroad bridge near the city of Kweilin, China.
(U.S. Army Military History Institute)

reached these landing areas, the threat of future strikes on Japanese-held territory from these airfields remained. Thus, despite nominal opposition by units from nineteen Chinese “armies” in the area, Japanese forces rapidly moved west into Kiangsi Province until a Chinese counterattack in August threw them back. Perhaps unduly impressed with the ability of his own forces to check further Japanese excursions into the Chinese interior, Chiang supported Chennault’s concept of an offensive air campaign against the Japanese supply lines and, eventually, Japan itself. Such a theater strategy, relying on U.S. air power for offensive operations, also promised to reduce Chiang’s own casualties while avoiding some of Stilwell’s administrative reforms that ignored the political realities of the Chinese military organization.

The continuing problems involved in airlifting supplies into China exacerbated the tension between Chiang and Stilwell. In March of 1943 the 124 transport aircraft then available delivered only about



Chinese soldiers receive training in use of the bayonet. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

4,000 tons of supplies, 1,500 of which were designated for Chennault's forces. Meanwhile, pursuing his own objectives, Stilwell had managed to establish artillery, infantry, and signal training centers at Kunming in February 1943, but reorganizing and equipping of the Y-Force lagged. Indeed, most small arms and other equipment for the now 32-division, American-supported force would come from existing Chinese stocks, with the United States providing primarily mortars and artillery.

While the Thirty Division plan, which included the Y-Force in southern China, remained behind schedule, Chennault continued to lobby all who would listen for expanded air operations from China bases. Having secured a U.S. heavy bombardment group in March, he obtained Roosevelt's support for an offensive air campaign using these bombers from forward bases in east China. The general envisioned air attacks against Japan itself by the end of 1943. Roosevelt

endorsed Chennault's optimistic plan, allocating him at least 4,700 tons per month of airlifted supplies for the Fourteenth Air Force, beginning in July 1943. Though Roosevelt also set an overall goal of 10,000 tons per month by September to accommodate the Thirty Division plan, ground supplies still languished in India. The only real consolation Stilwell received was Marshall's agreement to support a second Thirty Division plan after completing training and equipping of the first group.

Rebuffed again in his plan to reopen the Burma Road through a combined offensive from China and Burma, Stilwell's headquarters concentrated during the summer of 1943 on plans to rebuild the Chinese Army. Despite Chiang's insistence on giving Chennault a higher priority, Stilwell stubbornly expected to train and equip the thirty Chinese divisions in the Y-Force as envisioned in the lend-lease plan, as well as the two, later three, divisions in India. With the U.S. Army liaison team which had been scheduled for the Burma Road operations serving as training advisers to the Y-Force in the interim, Stilwell worked quietly through Marshall to pressure Chiang about using the Y-Force to reopen the Burma Road.

At the Quebec Conference in August 1943, Allied leaders agreed on an early 1944 date for a counteroffensive into Burma. Stilwell sent the Chinese 22d and 38th Divisions, then at Ramgarh, into northern Burma in December. A third Chinese division, the 30th, entered the campaign shortly afterwards. U.S. Army engineers followed closely behind, building the Ledo Road from India to connect with the Burma Road just south of the China border. American logistical planners believed that by reopening a ground route to China, 65,000 tons of supplies per month could move over all-weather roads. But scarcity still dictated strategy in the CBI theater. For example, transport aircraft, vital for Stilwell's plans and always in short supply, were diverted from flying the Hump to air drop supplies to Allied forces fighting in Burma. Again the Thirty Division plan found itself relegated to a backwater.

Likewise, plans for the expedited development of an offensive Chinese ground capability clashed with Chennault's air campaign initiatives. War Department approval to stage B-29 heavy bombers from bases in China for a strategic air campaign against Japan triggered a massive base construction program and a follow-on logistical effort whose costs were enormous. Initial plans called for over 400 transport aircraft to support B-29 operations in China. In reality the Air Transport Command flew nearly 18,000 tons over the Hump from February through October 1944 to support the B-29 program.

This was more tonnage than it had delivered to the Chinese Army since May 1942.

The B-29 campaign and Fourteenth Air Force operations consumed most of the of airlifted supplies during the first six months of 1944. Although monthly air transport reached a peak of 8,632 tons in October 1943, at least half of that went to Chennault. Both Roosevelt and Chiang's support for the air option left the Y-Force only partially equipped and unprepared for combat, further increasing Stilwell's frustrations. To mollify him, Chiang at least approved his earlier recommendation for a second Thirty Division plan. Designated the "ZEBRA Force" by U.S. advisers, this group would defend air bases in east China and eventually undertake a counteroffensive against Japanese forces in the Yangtze valley.

Always hopeful, Stilwell established an infantry training center at Kweilin in Kwangsi Province soon afterwards and staffed it with about 2,200 U.S. personnel. But until the needs of the first Thirty Division plan had been met, the War Department committed itself to providing only 10 percent of ZEBRA Force's requirements, enough for no more than preliminary training efforts.

American patience with the slow pace of progress in China was not indefinite. As Tokyo began deploying troops from China to other theaters, American criticism over the failure of the Chinese Army to initiate offensive operations began to grow. Beginning in December 1943, for example, five Japanese infantry divisions departed China for the Pacific islands. Although this force represented only a small portion of the *China Expeditionary Army's* 620,000 men organized into some thirty-two division equivalents, it clearly signaled Japan's lack of concern with Chinese military capabilities.

Growing U.S. disquiet over Nationalist inaction even prompted some American interest in the Chinese Communists. Stilwell had complained to Marshall and Roosevelt that as many as 500,000 Nationalist soldiers were preoccupied with blockading the Communists rather than fighting the Japanese. Meanwhile, bottled up in Yen-an by both the Japanese and Chiang's forces, Mao Tse-tung had initiated an ambitious guerrilla campaign against the Japanese in occupied northern China. On 9 February 1944, Roosevelt formally asked Chiang to permit a U.S. "observer mission" in Yen-an to gather military intelligence about the Japanese and coordinate the rescue of downed U.S. airmen. Despite U.S. arguments that this mission was military, not political, Chiang rejected the request.

The growing gulf between the United States and China over theater strategy was further widened by the inaction of the Y-Force during the

Burma campaign. Despite Stilwell's urging that Y-Force support the Allied offensive in northern Burma by attacking the *Japanese 56th Division* astride the Burma Road in western Yunnan Province, Chiang demurred. The Generalissimo pointed out that U.S. lend-lease supplies to the Y-Force, including 244 howitzers, had been inadequate to equip and support the entire force. Stilwell countered that deficiencies in Y-Force readiness resulted primarily from the Chinese refusal to either man units at full strength or to merge skeletonized formations into effective fighting divisions. To break the impasse, Roosevelt demanded on 3 April that Chiang attack the understrength and overextended 56th Division with the Y-Force. When the Americans threatened to divert April Y-Force supplies to the Fourteenth Air Force instead, Chiang finally approved committing the Y-Force into action.

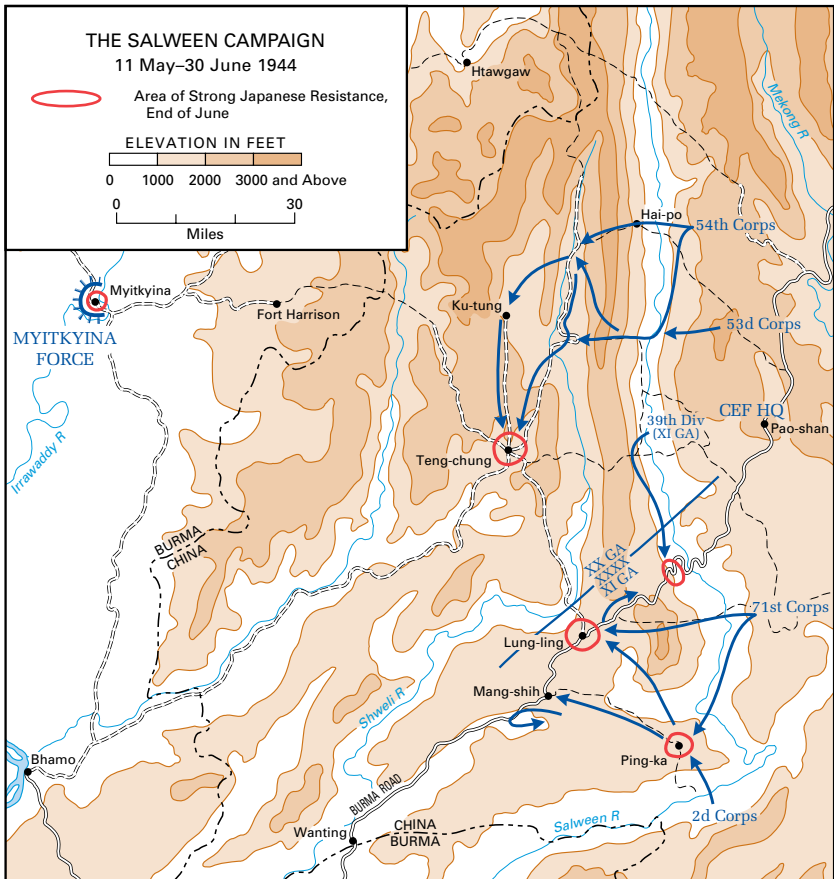
Advised and supported by Brig. Gen. Frank Dorn's Y-Force Operations Staff (Y-FOS), General Wei Li-huang's Chinese Expeditionary Force of six armies comprised sixteen divisions. Wei crossed the Salween River on the night of 11–12 May. He intended to trap the Japanese in a pincers movement by securing key terrain both north and south of the Burma Road, but unexpectedly strong Japanese resistance stopped the Chinese advance. Siege operations against several Japanese strongpoints eventually proved successful, but at the price of slowing the tempo of advance. Japanese resistance to the north, at Teng-chung, proved especially stubborn. In the south, Wei's XI Group Army reached the outskirts of Lung-ling on the Burma Road in early June before being pushed back by a Japanese counterattack on 16 June. Suffering from overextended supply lines, and in extremely difficult terrain with units averaging only 60 percent effective strength, Wei's attack ground to a halt.

Wei's failure coincided with a major Japanese offensive in southern and central China. Stung by increasingly audacious air attacks by the Fourteenth Air Force, and aware of preparations for B-29 operations against the Japanese home islands, Tokyo ordered the ICHIGO offensive. The Japanese intended to capture Allied airfields in east China and to open an overland supply route stretching from Pusan, Korea, to Saigon, French Indochina. Such a line of communication would reduce demand on the empire's maritime lifeline, which was badly frayed by unrelenting Allied submarine attacks. Key goals were securing the entire north-south Peiping-Huangshi rail line, as well as the Wuchang-Liuchow rail line in central China. To provide the needed force, the Japanese shifted units from the *Kwantung Army* and *Mongolia Garrison Army* south, bringing their forces in China proper to 820,000 men. Fifteen divisions would participate in Operation ICHIGO.



Launched on 19 April 1944, Operation ICHIGO eliminated Chinese resistance in Honan Province in central China by late April. To the south, the Japanese offensive also enjoyed a steady string of victories from May through August, although both the Chinese Army and the U.S. Fourteenth Air Force harassed and delayed the pace of the Japanese advance. The Z-Force had begun receiving some support from the Kweilin Training Center, but remained woefully ineffective, as the Y-Force had a first priority for all training and equipment.

Operation ICHIGO provoked a major crisis in the China-Burma-India theater. Facing the first major Japanese offensive since December 1941, Chiang blamed Chinese setbacks on delays of Allied supplies to both Y- and Z-Forces, threatening to withdraw General Wei's units from the northern Burma campaign to defend southeastern China.



Chiang noted Fourteenth Air Force successes in disrupting Japanese lines of supply along the railway from Wuchang, and endorsed further diversion of Hump tonnage to sustain these efforts at the expense of ground operations.

Stilwell was equally obstinate. He blamed the reverses on Chiang's unwillingness to reform command and training practices of Chinese Army units. He also believed Chiang had to make common cause with the Chinese Communists to defeat the Japanese. He denounced Chiang's decision to divert Hump tonnage from his ground forces to the Fourteenth Air Force. President Roosevelt supported Stilwell and



*General Wedemeyer arrives in Chungking in October 1944.
(U.S. Army Military History Institute)*

on 19 September urged Chiang to place Stilwell in effective command of all Chinese ground units, including the Communists. Heretofore Roosevelt had supported Chiang's strategic vision. Now he signaled clearly that future support depended on Chiang's accepting U.S. strategic guidance. Chiang, however, remained resistant to American advice and, on 2 October, formally rejected Roosevelt's proposal. Thereafter, American relations with Nationalist China, while outwardly warm, slowly became more formal.

Having already decided to split China into a separate theater from Burma and India, Roosevelt recalled Stilwell on 18 October, replacing him with Maj. Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer. As head of the U.S. China-Burma-India (CBI) theater, Stilwell had reported to two different supreme commanders: Chiang and the British Admiral Lord Louis



Officers observe an attack on a fortified Chinese city. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

Mountbatten of the Southeast Asia Command. This was an arrangement that became progressively more difficult as the tempo of operations increased in both theaters. General Wedemeyer, however, would serve only as chief of the U.S. China theater. Nevertheless, when the new commander arrived in Chungking on 31 October, he inherited all of Stilwell's difficulties with Generalissimo Chiang. There, at the Nationalist wartime capital, he found the situation tense and atmosphere defeatist. Even Chiang's political allies expressed growing criticism of his leadership as the *Japanese China Expeditionary Army* moved deeper and deeper into Kwangsi Province.

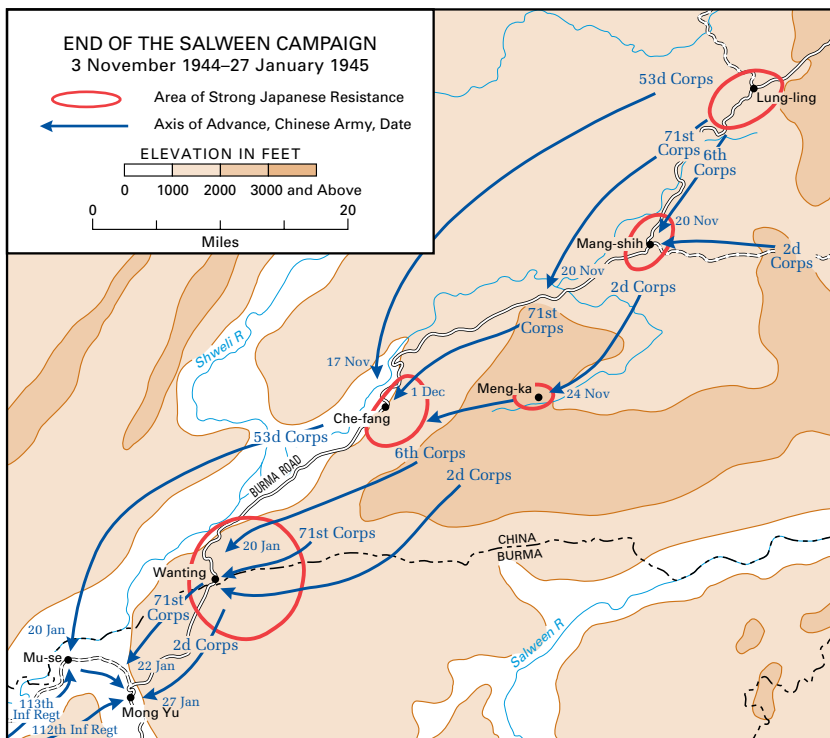
General Wedemeyer had advantages when dealing with Chiang that General Stilwell lacked. Freed of overseeing Chinese operations in Burma, Wedemeyer also relinquished the role of Chinese lend-lease administrator. He was more tactful than Stilwell and better able to get along personally with Chiang. He also benefited from dramatic increases in Air Transport Command strength. In October 1944 almost 300 aircraft flew 35,131 tons of supplies over the Hump, four times the monthly tonnage of the previous year. Yet Wedemeyer still had only a small advisory force of about 4,800 officers and men attached to the Training Centers, the Y-Force, and the badly mauled Z-Force. Indeed,

most supplies for the first Thirty Division plan and the approved 10 percent of supplies for the second Thirty Division plan still remained in India awaiting either airlift or the reopening of the Burma Road. Not until the overland route reopened could Wedemeyer's logisticians hope to deliver sufficient supplies and equipment to sustain even two and a half divisions per month.

Unlike his predecessor, Wedemeyer had easy access to the Communists. Chiang had reluctantly agreed to allow a small U.S. liaison mission to enter the Communist-controlled area of north China. But Col. David D. Barrett, who headed this military mission, was soon eclipsed by Maj. Gen. Patrick J. Hurley, the flamboyant American ambassador to China. Hurley worked from November 1944 through January 1945 trying to patch together a Nationalist and Communist military coalition, hoping to divert Japanese troops in the south through a series of coordinated Nationalist-Red Army joint offensives in the north. Meantime, Barrett's mission proposed to support Mao's guerrilla campaign in Japanese-occupied north China. However, largely because of Nationalist objections, nothing came of either American proposal.

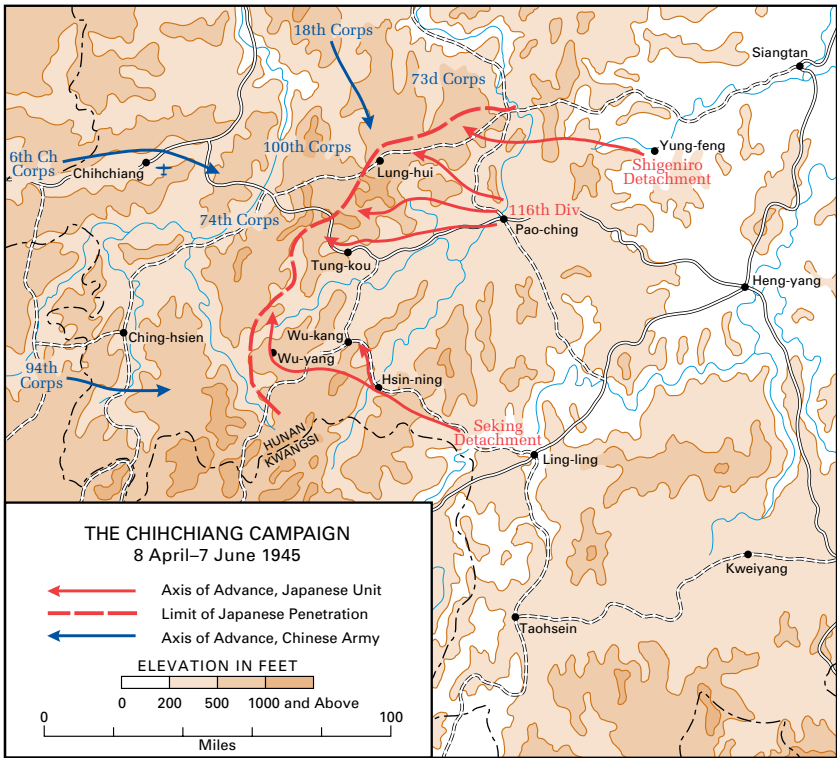
At the end of 1944, Wedemeyer and Chiang still faced the steadily advancing *Japanese Army* in southeast China. The ICHIGO offensive captured both Kweilin and Liuchow, a Fourteenth Air Force base, on 10 November, and two weeks later Japanese forces captured Nan-ning in the extreme south, linking up with *Japanese Southern Army* units advancing north from French Indochina shortly thereafter. By the end of the year Japan's *China Expeditionary Army* had achieved Operation ICHIGO's two primary goals: opening a land route to French Indochina and capturing southeast China air bases. Although B-29 air raids on Japan did continue from bases farther west, they were too minor to have much impact on the overall air campaign.

Wedemeyer responded to continued Japanese successes with an operational plan to protect the capital of Yunnan Province, Kunming, against a further enemy offensive. Code-named Operation ALPHA, the plan sought to reinforce Chinese units in southeastern China with two divisions from Burma and the 53d Army, part of the Y-Force. Although Chiang neither accepted nor rejected the plan, Wedemeyer nevertheless shifted available Hump supply tonnage to the ALPHA Force divisions and, at the same time, merged the Y- and Z-Force advisory staffs, as well as his training and service school advisers, into the Chinese Training and Combat Command under General Dorn. The entire effort was yet another U.S. design for equipping and organizing selected Chinese Army units for specific campaigns under American direction. Like the others, it suffered a mixed fate.



Meanwhile, south of the Chinese border, the campaign to reopen the Burma Road with Y-Force units had begun moving again. Having taken Tengchong by siege in August, General Wei's XI Group Army attacked Lung-ling on 29 October, seizing it on 3 November. Wei's depleted units then slowly advanced against the *Japanese 56th Division's* strong rearguard action, finally capturing Che-fang on 1 December. Following another protracted battle, on 20 January Wei's troops seized Wanting on the Burmese border, completing a linkup with Allied troops from Burma on 27 January. Finally, the Japanese blockade of China was broken. An overland motor convoy departed Ledo, Burma, on 12 January and reached Kunming on 4 February, the first of many runs bringing much needed supplies and equipment to the Chinese Army.

Victory in the Salween campaign and the reopening of a ground supply route to China allowed Wedemeyer to concentrate on building the ALPHA Force. Restructuring Stilwell's earlier and incomplete Thirty Division plans, Wedemeyer proposed a Thirty-Six Division



plan, organized around former Y-Force units and supported by a 4,000-strong American advisory mission. The latter would provide advisory teams to each Chinese regiment. With the Burma Road open and Hump tonnage accumulating, Wedemeyer believed he could equip and train thirty-six Chinese divisions by September 1945. Combat losses of existing equipment would have had to be replaced, somewhat complicating the supply problem.

While most ALPHA Force units were undergoing initial training, the enemy struck. On 8 April, Japan's 20th Army launched a local offensive from territory in southern China seized earlier during Operation ICHIGO. Their target was the American air base at Chihchiang. The Japanese 116th Division initially drove back four Chinese armies: the 18th, 73d, 74th, and 100th. Hurriedly, U.S. planes and trucks carried the "new" 6th and the 94th Armies to Chihchiang to reinforce retreating Chinese forces. By early May, Chinese forces had finally halted the Japanese offensive well short of the Chihchiang air field, and by June they had driven the Japanese back to their original line of departure.

The Chihchiang campaign was the last major Japanese offensive in China. General Wedemeyer had already initiated planning for a major Chinese offensive in the summer of 1945 intended to open a seaport on China's east coast. Equally important for the China theater was Plan KETSU, adopted by *Imperial General Headquarters* on 1 April. Intended to strengthen the defenses of the Japanese home islands, and also counter a possible Allied amphibious landing in southern China, Plan KETSU provided for major deployments from the Asian mainland back to Japan and for the concentration of the *China Expeditionary Force* along the coast. Allied defensive operations in China were over, and a new offensive campaign was finally ready to begin.

Analysis

The China theater posed unique problems for the U.S. military. Unlike Western Europe, where key partners employed comparable resources, operations in China involved only a handful of U.S. ground and logistical units in support of huge Chinese armies. Moreover, civil strife in China, which long predated the outbreak of World War II and was, at best, only obscured by the struggle with Imperial Japan, made any conventional approach to American support unrealistic. Within both the Nationalist Chinese and Red Chinese armies, internal politics and military reform were inextricably linked, and any hope of creating an effective and conventional Chinese military while temporarily shelving China's internal political problems was unrealistic.

The U.S. Army's main role in China was to keep China in the war through the provision of advice and materiel assistance. As long as China stayed in the war, hundreds of thousands of *Imperial Japanese Army* soldiers could be tied down on the Asian mainland. Success was thus measured differently than in most theaters. How well both General Stilwell and General Wedemeyer persuaded the theater commander-in-chief, Generalissimo Chiang, to support U.S. strategic goals, and how effectively U.S. training and materiel support could build selected Chinese Army divisions into modern tactical units, capable of standing up to Japanese adversaries, were secondary objectives. What mattered most was simply keeping China in the war against Japan.

The major U.S. failure in China was logistical: America was not able to meet its lend-lease commitments. The closing of the Burma Road in 1942 made it impossible to deliver sufficient equipment, weapons, and munitions to build the dream of a well-equipped and trained thirty-division Chinese force. By the time the Burma Road



China-bound supply convoy travels up the Burma Road. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

reopened and supplies flowed freely across the border into China, operations in other theaters had shaped the course of the war against Japan. A paucity of available airlift capacity meant that deliveries of supplies to China over the Hump proved barely adequate to replace Chinese war losses, but not to sustain a major unit modernization and training program. Generalissimo Chiang used this U.S. failure to undermine General Stilwell's credibility in Chungking and to reject his strategic and operational guidance when it conflicted with the Generalissimo's desires.

The political nature of the Nationalist Chinese Army threatened all American objectives in the China theater. Since that army served primarily as a political tool of Chiang Kai-shek and as a foundation of the Nationalist regime, any action that modified its structure or risked its destruction was assiduously avoided by the Nationalist government. The army had to be maintained, not reformed. Military commanders were selected for their political loyalty to Chiang rather than for their military ability, and risking excessive casualties through offensive operations was unacceptable. Chiang also had to keep his Communist rivals at bay, habitually using his best troops for that purpose.

Combined operations by rival Chinese armies against the Japanese were impossible. Thus, differing Sino-American aims, magnified by internal political conflict, cultural differences, and the personality conflicts between General Stilwell and Generalissimo Chiang, all inhibited chances for success in the war effort.

Both Stilwell and Wedemeyer found themselves involved in competing priorities between the air and ground wars. Although he recognized the value of the support of the Fourteenth Air Force to the Chinese Army, Stilwell was increasingly frustrated by Chennault's success in selling his ambitious air campaign. Chennault had secured President Roosevelt's support by promising a quick, cheap victory through air power that avoided relying on the problem-ridden Chinese Army. The thought of using Chinese air bases for U.S. planes to attack Japanese bases in China, Japanese shipping in the Pacific, and Japan itself had tremendous appeal to the president. The same concept appealed to Chiang because it required few of his precious resources. In contrast, the plans of Stilwell and Wedemeyer demanded the "Americanization" of theater operations and a major overhaul of the Chinese Army. Ironically, for political rather than military reasons, Chennault's request for diversion of Hump supply tonnage and coolie laborers to build air bases was perhaps the more practicable course of action.

Despite these problems, the China Defensive Campaign succeeded. China remained in the war, diverting 600,000 to 800,000 Japanese troops, who might otherwise have been deployed to the Pacific. Because of U.S. support to China, the *Japanese Army* might conduct limited offensive operations there, but had no hope of ultimate victory on the Asian continent. Chiang relied on his U.S. allies to open the Burma Road, and on U.S. air power to check Japanese offensives by interdicting supply lines in order to conserve his own army and the territory in the interior of China that his government continued to control. By May 1945, the United States and China were finally ready to assume the offensive in China.

CHINA DEFENSIVE 1942–1945

Further Readings

The most extensive and detailed analysis of World War II operations in the China-Burma-India theater remains the three-volume Army official history of the theater by Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland: *Stilwell's Mission to China* (1956), *Stilwell's Command Problems* (1956), and *Time Runs Out in CBI* (1959). For flavor, *The Stilwell Papers*, edited by Theodore H. White (1948) is still recommended, while for a critical appraisal, see Chin-tung Liang's book *General Stilwell in China, 1942–1944: The Full Story* (1972). Japanese perspectives can be found in Meirion and Susie Herries, *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army* (1991); Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: World War II and the Japanese, 1931–1945* (1978), and Saburo Hayashi and Alvin D. Coox, *Kogun: The Japanese Army in the Pacific War* (1959).

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Cover: *Chinese mule pack moves troops down the Burma Road.*
(U.S. Army Military History Institute)