BEYOND THE INDO-BURMESE BORDER

By WERNER JAHNKE

Since Japan drove out the British and Chungking troops from Burma in May 1942, the 600 miles of Indo-Burmese frontier are the only front between the Japanese and Anglo-American armies on the Asiatic mainland. During the summer and autumn of 1942, the British had to recover from their defeats. Moreover, the rainy season lasting from May to October prevented the commencing of a counteroffensive. But in the middle of October 1942 there was a war council in New Delhi of Generals Wavell, Stilwell, Lo Cho-ying, and Auchinleck, the supreme commanders of the British forces in India, the American forces in China and India, the Chungking troops forced out of Burma into India, and the British Near East Army respectively. During the same month the battles began between the Allied and Japanese air forces, and on December 18 the British started an attack along the coast against Burma which, after some initial advances, suffered a severe setback in March and April 1943.

The object of all this fighting is not so much Burma as the fact that the Anglo-Americans want at all costs to reopen the Burma Road, which connected Chungking with the outer world and which was closed by the Japanese conquest of Burma. By reopening this road they hope to prevent Chungking from giving up its war against Japan as a result of a lack in war materials.

Hence the fighting on the Indo-Burmese border possesses a significance far more than local for the further continuation of the world war. The base from which the Allies intend to carry out their attacks against Burma is Northeast India, and we have asked Mr. Jahnke, who knows Burma and Northeast India from years of personal experience, to write the following article for us.—K.M.

"CHOTA Hazri, Sahib," said the Indian room boy. He quietly placed a tray with some tea, fruit, and buttered toast on the table beside my bed. Chota Hazri time is rising time in India and Burma, when one usually takes some light refreshment as a kind of preliminary to the more substantial breakfast that follows after one has had one's morning shower and finished dressing. As I drew aside the mosquito curtain over my bed, I looked at my watch. It was 5 a.m. and still dark outside—a rather unusually early time for me to have Chota Hazri, and I should certainly not have risen at such an unearthly hour had it not been for the fact that I was due to leave Rangoon by plane for Calcutta that morning.

As we were driving along the country road leading to the airfield, the sun rose in all its splendor. It was a beautiful morning early in October, and as yet there was none of that unpleasant humid heat which is felt all over lower Burma toward midday. When our plane left the ground it was just after 6.30 a.m.

As the morning was very clear, with practically no clouds in the sky, we enjoyed an almost unobstructed view of the country below. We had risen to an altitude of about 500 feet, and we were gradually gaining height as the plane set course in a northwesterly direction. Immediately below us lay the fertile plains of the mighty Irrawaddy delta with its network of canals and waterways. In between there was a multitude of neatly marked squares: the rice fields of the delta region, which are the main source of Burma's annual rice production of more than three million tons. Looking back, the outline of the city of Rangoon with its famous landmark, the Shwe Dagon or Golden Pagoda, gradually vanished from view.

ABOVE THE ARAKAN COAST

Our plane climbed higher and higher, and soon we saw before us the mountain
range of the Arakan Yomas, which separate the Irrawaddy valley from the Arakan coast and which we had to cross in order to reach the coast at Akyab. The Arakan Yomas, a wild and practically uninhabited mountain range reaching an altitude of more than 10,000 feet in some places, extend from the Irrawaddy delta region near Bassein northwest as far as the upper reaches of the Chindwin River, forming a natural barrier between the plains of Burma and the Indian provinces of Bengal and Assam. As we approached the mountains, the scenery below underwent a complete change. Instead of the sparsely wooded plains and rice fields which we had just passed over, there were now mountains covered with dense forest and jungles with deep valleys in between.

While I was gazing on the seemingly endless maze of forests below, one of the officers of the plane came up to me and, pointing at the wilderness we were passing over, said: “If we should ever have the misfortune of having to make a forced landing in this godforsaken country, I doubt whether any of us would get out alive.” The Arakan Yomas are indeed known to contain some of the most impenetrable jungles in this part of Asia. There are no roads leading through these mountains and, as far as is known, no white man has ever crossed this country, which is the abode of a great variety of wild animals besides being infested with malaria. The northern part of the range, known also as the Chin Hills, is inhabited by a very primitive hill tribe, the Chins.

It was almost a relief to get away from this inhospitable country and to reach the flat strip of land at the western base of the mountains which is known as the Arakan coast and which, next to the Irrawaddy delta, is one of the most fertile rice-growing districts of Burma. About 250,000 tons of rice were exported annually from this country through its only harbor, Akyab, which is situated on an island off the main coast. From a scenic point of view the Arakan coast ranks among the most attractive parts of Burma. Innumerable islands, of which Akyab island is but one, stud the coast along its entire length. A remarkable fact about this region is that, although there are fairly good roads along the coast itself, there are neither roads nor rail connections leading to the remainder of Burma. It was found too big a problem to construct roads or railway lines across the Arakan Yomas, and as a result the only connection between Akyab and Rangoon is by sea or by air.

The people living along the coast are known as Arakanese and, though they are essentially Burmese by race, there is a noticeable admixture of Indian blood emanating from the neighboring province of Bengal. The Arakanese are mainly peasants engaged in rice growing, and they are said to be of a somewhat violent disposition which has been the source of frequent difficulties with the British administration of the area.

The British conquest of Burma started in Arakan when in 1824 a dispute arose between the East India Company and the King of Burma over the ill-defined frontier between Arakan and Bengal and over the Burmese incursion into Assam. This led to the first Anglo-Burmese war. Further successive campaigns ended with the complete annexation of Burma by the British Crown in 1886.

THE MOUTHS OF THE HOOGHLY

Having passed over the coast near Akyab, we reached the sea. The surface of the Bay of Bengal appeared so smooth from our plane that the bay almost resembled a huge inland lake. We were heading straight across the bay for the coast of Bengal, the dim outlines of which became visible after about an hour's flight over the sea.

As we approached the mouths of the Hooghly River, the sight that presented itself to us was truly impressive. There, about 3,000 feet below us, lay the coast of Bengal with its maze of tidal rivers and estuaries which form the mouths of the Hooghly. The latter, in turn, is but a part of the huge system of waterways and canals forming the delta of
the Ganges. Through it India's most sacred river ejects its muddy waters into the Bay of Bengal after having joined up with the great Brahmaputra River, which has its source in Tibet and flows through Assam and lower Bengal. Seen from our plane, this vast system of rivers forming the combined estuaries of the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Hooghly looked like the tentacles of an enormous octopus reaching out to sea. The Hooghly delta has a great many swampy islands, known as the Sunderbans. Some of these are covered with dense forests, while others again are mere sandbanks which appear only during low tide.

At one time the Hooghly River was the only channel through which the Ganges poured its water into the bay. In the course of time, however, the Hooghly became silted up with sand and other alluvial matter carried down by the Ganges, so that the latter had to divert its main flow in a more easterly direction, reaching the sea east of the Sunderbans. The continuous silting up of the Hooghly is setting the most serious problems for navigation, and it requires great skill to pilot big oceangoing vessels safely up to the harbor of Calcutta, which lies some eighty miles upriver. The precautions which have to be exercised in navigating the river are also apt greatly to prolong the steamer's voyage. Thus the voyage from Calcutta to Rangoon usually takes from two and a half to three days; but it may quite easily take four days or even more if, owing to adverse tidal conditions, the steamer has to drop anchor halfway down the river and stop there for the night until the water is sufficiently high for her to continue. It has been estimated that, if the river continues to silt up at the present rate, in a hundred years from now it will no longer be possible for large vessels to proceed as far as Calcutta, and this in

Northeast India
spite of the continuous dredging being carried out to keep the river open for navigation.

Following the course of the Hooghly, we soon came within sight of the great city of Calcutta. It was shortly after 10 a.m. when we made a landing at the airport of Dumdum, which is a suburb about half an hour from the center of Calcutta. While we were up in the air it had been delightfully cool, but now, as we stepped out of the plane, we got a full measure of the damp heat which prevails throughout the plains of Bengal during October, the last month of the monsoon in this part of India.

SECOND LARGEST CITY OF THE EMPIRE

The traveler coming to Calcutta for the first time does not immediately realize that he is in the second largest city of the British Empire. Outwardly, at least, the town looks very much like many of the other large Indian cities; and, with the exception perhaps of the more conspicuous public buildings, there is very little to remind one of the Empire’s largest city—London.

In contrast to the European business and residential section, which is comparatively clean and has wide and well-planned streets, the Indian part of the city, which naturally occupies by far the largest part of the town, is heavily overcrowded and consists of a maze of narrow streets and lanes cutting through smelly bazaars. The sanitary conditions in some of these quarters defy all description; and in this respect Calcutta is no better off than some of the other large Indian cities such as Bombay or Madras.

With its population of roughly 1,500,000, of which only about 10,000 are Europeans, Calcutta certainly lags far behind London. Nevertheless, its importance as a shipping and industrial center is undisputed and is perhaps best realized when one arrives by steamer and slowly travels up the Hooghly past the numerous industrial establishments which line both river banks. Among these the jute mills are first in importance, as Bengal is the center of India’s jute industry, which supplies 85 per cent of the world’s requirements. Then there are cotton, oil, and flour mills, as well as extensive engineering works; and finally, as one enters Calcutta harbor, the modern Kidderpore and King George Docks. In addition to the repair work carried on in these docks, Calcutta has in recent years become an important shipbuilding center.

INDIA’S LARGEST PORT

Calcutta owes its importance as a trading and distributing center to the fact that it is situated in one of India’s richest provinces which, on account of its extensive industrial activity and the wealth of its population, is generally in a position to absorb large quantities of imported goods. On the other hand, most of the exportable produce of Bengal and the adjoining provinces is shipped from the port of Calcutta to all parts of the globe. Apart from jute, cotton, oil-seed, and hides, large quantities of tea from the Himalayan and Assam hills pass through Calcutta on their way to the markets of the world. This extensive trade accounts for the busy activity of Calcutta harbor, which handles about 4 million tons of shipping every year, thus ensuring Calcutta’s position as India’s largest port, leaving second place to Bombay, although the latter is much more favorably situated from a geographical point of view.

The European business section of the city is situated on the left bank of the Hooghly and is connected by a large floating bridge with the industrial suburb of Howrah on the opposite right bank. Howrah Bridge, as it is called, is the largest bridge of its kind in India and, being the only connection between the right and left banks of the Hooghly, has to handle an enormous amount of traffic, particularly in the morning and late afternoon. To watch this traffic passing by is an experience in itself. Besides a motley crowd of colorful people crossing the bridge in both directions, one can see every description of vehicle, from the
modest bullock cart and the Indian horse-drawn gharry to the latest model of American limousine. Then, again, it is quite a common sight to see large herds of cattle being driven across the bridge, lending an almost pastoral note to the otherwise very city-like surroundings.

Only a few hundred yards away from Howrah Bridge is Calcutta's main railway terminus, Howrah Station. It is upon this largest railway junction of India that converge all the more important railway lines linking Calcutta with southern, western, and central India as well as with the faraway frontier provinces of the Northwest.

Although Bengal, like other parts of India, has a definite cool season lasting from the end of November until March, during which the temperature may drop to 60 degrees Fahrenheit or sometimes even less, the climate is generally very humid. This is particularly trying during the hot weather, lasting from April to June, and the mercury has been known to rise to 117 degrees Fahrenheit. The hot weather is followed by the rainy season, which lasts till October and gives but little relief on account of the increased humidity.

IRON, STEEL, AND COAL

Bengal, together with the adjoining provinces of Bihar and Orissa, is the center of India's metallurgical industries, which have made great progress in the last ten years and especially since the outbreak of the war in 1939. The Indian iron and steel industry dates back to 1874, when large deposits of iron ore were discovered in the neighborhood of what is today the important industrial center of Jamshedpur and Tatanagar. Two factors contributed greatly to the establishment of industry in these districts: first, the easy accessibility of the iron ore, keeping production costs down to a minimum; and secondly, the high iron content of the ore, amounting in some instances to 70 per cent, whereas, by way of comparison, the iron ore mined in Germany and other parts of Europe often has no more than 25 per cent iron content. Another important factor which has encouraged the manufacture of iron and steel here is the close proximity of India's largest coal deposits. The Rani-ganj collieries in the Burdwan district were opened as early as 1821, and they remained India's most lucrative coal deposits until 1905. In that year the Jharia coal fields, situated partly in Bihar and Orissa and partly in Bengal, came into greater prominence. Today the Jharia collieries are by far the most

CARTOON OF THE MONTH

By SAPAJOU

On the Indo-Burmese Border
important coal fields in India. The Bengal portions of these collieries alone produce about five million tons of coal annually, which is about a quarter of India's total production.

At Jamshedpur and Tatanagar, both of which are situated in Bihar on the Calcutta/Nagpur/Bombay railway line, are the largest iron and steel works in India, the Tata Iron and Steel Company, which was floated in the latter part of the last century by Jamsetji N. Tata, a Parsee businessman whose name is well known even beyond India's frontiers. Though primarily connected with the manufacture of iron and steel, the interests of the Tata concern are widespread in India.

Before the outbreak of the present war, the Jamshedpur and Tatanagar plants had an annual capacity of 800,000 tons of pig iron and 600,000 tons of finished steel. About 60,000 workmen were employed at the plants, though this number has been known to rise to 100,000 workers during periods of record production. Since the outbreak of the war in 1939, the capacity of Tata's iron- and steel-making plants has been increased by the building of additional modern blast furnaces, some of which can produce as much as 1,700 tons a day. In 1940/41 the total amount of pig iron produced in India was reported to exceed 2 million tons, while the production of finished steel was about one million tons during the same period. Of these quantities roughly 70 per cent is produced by Tata's at their plants at Jamshedpur and Tatanagar, while the remainder is divided among various smaller production centers all over India. It is quite likely that the 1940/41 production figures have in the meantime been substantially increased in view of the mounting demand for iron and steel as a result of the present war. (A detailed survey of India's industrial war production can be found in Vol. III, No. 4, the October 1942 issue of this magazine.)

Not far from Jamshedpur are the largest railway yards of their kind in India. This plant employed about 45,000 workmen in 1938 and, in addition to carrying out repair work, built railway coaches for the Indian State Railways.

**PEOPLE OF BENGAL**

Bengal had a total population of 51,000,000 in 1931, of which about 96 per cent belong to the distinct Bengali race speaking Bengali, a language of Sanskrit origin. Bengal is the only province of India in which Mohammedans outnumber Hindus by a small margin. Thus the former account for 54 per cent of the total population, and one third of all Mohammedans in India live in Bengal.

The Bengali, though rather dark of complexion, is a pleasant type of Indian, and the women of Bengal are easily among the most beautiful of India. The Bengalis are a proud, independent-minded race and troublesome subjects of the British Crown, and it is a well-known fact that Bengal is the center of Indian nationalism. Among the higher and middle classes of the population there is a definite craving for learning and knowledge, and both Calcutta and Dacca have excellent universities in which all modern sciences are taught. But on the whole the percentage of illiteracy is surprisingly high, and one can say that about 50 per cent of the total population can neither read nor write.

India's best-known writer, poet, and philosopher is the late Dr. Rabindranath Tagore, who was born in Bengal and who established his own university of art and science at Shantineketan near Calcutta.

Until the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War there was a small Japanese community in Calcutta. There is also quite an important community of Chinese there, living in Calcutta's Chinatown. Among the European population, the British hold first place of course, and their influence in the political and commercial sphere is undisputed.

**STARTING POINT OF BRITISH EXPANSION . . .**

England's connection with Bengal dates from the early part of the seventeenth century, when the East India Company opened its factory at Hugli, a place on the Hooghly River just north of the
present city of Calcutta. In 1696 the Bengal establishment was reinforced by the building of Fort William; and, two years later, in 1698, the villages of Kalikata, Sutanati, and Gowindpur were purchased by the East India Company from the son of the Mogul emperor at Delhi. This transaction really marked the foundation of the present city of Calcutta. The Bengal factory of the East India Company gradually gained in importance and soon became the major point of British penetration in India.

The Nawab of Bengal, an Indian prince who became alarmed at the progress made by the English traders, resolved to drive them out of his province and in 1756 laid siege to the English settlement at Fort William, which he finally occupied. The prisoners taken by the Nawab, 145 men and one woman, were subsequently imprisoned in a small guardroom of Fort William. Most of the prisoners died during the night of suffocation. When the prison was opened the next day, only 23 people came out alive. This incident became known in history as "the black hole of Calcutta."

As a reprisal, and in order to regain their lost factory, the East India Company started a campaign against the Nawab which ended on June 23, 1757, with the Battle of Plassey under the leadership of Clive. The Nawab was deposed and replaced by a ruler whom the English knew to be favorable to their intentions. From then onward the British gradually consolidated their rule over India by extending their influence both politically and commercially until an English viceroy occupied the former throne of the Moguls in Delhi and the whole of India became a possession of the British Crown. Prior to the capital of the British administration being transferred to Delhi in 1912, Calcutta held the distinction of being the capital of India, and the English Governor of Bengal was concurrently Governor General of India.

... AND CRADLE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

It was from the province of Bengal that the British started their conquest of the whole of India, and it is perhaps natural that the forces of Indian nationalism directed against British imperialism should have first made themselves felt in this same province. In consolidating their Indian Empire, the British began to interfere with India's cultural life. This was particularly noticeable in their attempts to draw away the youth of Bengal from their age-old customs and educate them in the English way in order to turn them into loyal subjects of the British Crown. To counteract this, the Brahmo Samaj movement was founded in Bengal by Raja Ram Mohan Roy as early as 1828. This movement, which very soon spread all over India and which strove in the first place to purge the Hindu religion of alien practices, also succeeded in gaining more and more influence in the national life of the people by making them conscious of their duty to protect their culture against foreign interference. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was succeeded by Devendranath Tagore, the father of Rabindranath Tagore.

Owing to the unfortunate tendency among Indians to divide a great movement into small parties and factions, thereby causing splits in their ranks, the Brahmo Samaj movement lost much of its importance during the latter part of the last century. There can be no doubt, however, that this movement constituted the first serious attempt on the part of the Indian people to stem the tide of British imperialism. As such it may be considered the forerunner of the Indian National Congress Party, which was founded in Bombay in 1885 and which was the first to proclaim India's demand for national freedom and self-government. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress movement spread all over India, where it gained adherents not only among Hindus but also among Mohammedans. In Bengal particularly the Congress Party has many enthusiastic followers.

At the beginning of the present century, dissatisfaction with the British administration grew, and signs of serious political unrest began to appear in Bengal.
In order to nip any revolutionary attempts in the bud, the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, took the unfortunate step in 1905 of ordering the partition of Bengal. In this way, two separate administrative areas were constituted within the province. This step was the signal for a country-wide revolt, and for the first time in British Indian history a movement was started for the boycott of British goods.

REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

Simultaneously with this boycott, the youth of Bengal took to bombs and revolvers. It was the beginning of the revolutionary movement, the participants in which became known as "Swarajists." They formed the so-called left wing of the Congress Party; and, whereas Mahatma Gandhi strove to achieve Indian independence by constitutional means and was at times even inclined to compromise with the British, the Leftists, or Swarajists, demanded complete elimination of the British from the government of India and unconditional freedom for the country. This divergence of views eventually led to a split in the Congress Party, with the extreme elements constituting themselves as the "forward bloc," whose leader was the well-known Subhas Chandra Bose, one-time president of the Congress Party and former mayor of Calcutta.

With the spreading of the revolutionary movement, the political situation steadily deteriorated in Bengal. Not only did the people intensify the boycott of British goods, but they also refused to pay taxes. The British Government replied with ruthless measures of repression. Thousands of people were imprisoned without trial for their revolutionary actions. As the public jails became overcrowded with prisoners, the Government started the notorious detention camps in Bengal, which were soon filled with revolutionaries, particularly of the student class.

The centers of revolutionary activity in Bengal were Calcutta, Midnapore, Dacca, and Chittagong, and even up to the present day these places have remained the most restless ones in the province. Every now and then, the British-controlled press in India reports about "dacoities" (gang robberies) and "communal clashes between Mohammedans and Hindus" in these areas, incidents which are for the most part nothing but political riots against the Government's ruthless exploitation.

By 1911 the position in Bengal had become so serious that the Government was forced to reverse the partition of the province which had been decreed in 1905. This helped temporarily to pacify the people to a certain extent; but when after the Great War Britain's pledge of self-government to India was not fulfilled, agitation rose once again. Ever since then the province of Bengal has remained in a state of semi-revolt, which has lately been intensified by the arrest of the Congress leaders Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Moulana Abul Kalam Azad. The last named, a Mohammedan, is the present president of the Congress Party and a native of Bengal like Subhas Chandra Bose, who suffered many terms of imprisonment for his revolutionary activities. During the present war, Subhas Chandra Bose managed to escape from prison. He is now in Germany, from where he takes a keen interest in the directing of the revolutionary movement in India.

Among the common people of Bengal who suffer from British oppression, the farmers are the worst hit, and they constitute the bulk of the population for, in spite of its important industrial activity, Bengal is primarily an agricultural country. About four fifths of the arable land of the province is covered by rice, of which there is accordingly an abundance, so much so that normally Bengal is in a position to supply the surplus of its rice production to other parts of India where this commodity is comparatively scarce. Besides rice there are other crops such as oilseed, sugar cane, and above all jute, all of which yield good returns. The Bengal farmer should, therefore, be quite well off. In actual fact, however, owing to the heavy land
The Himalayas near Darjeeling

BEYOND THE BORDERS
OF BURMA
Assam and Bengal

Bengalese women at the spinning wheel

Bengalese village
taxes imposed by the British Government, he is unable to enjoy the fruits of his labor and more often than not is deeply in debt.

DARJEELING AND THE HIMALAYAS

The fertile and sun-baked plains of Bengal are bounded in the north by the towering range of the Himalayas, which form the natural barrier between India and Tibet. When it is steaming hot in Calcutta, people who can afford to leave the city invariably make for the hills, either by going up to Darjeeling or into the Assam hills, unless they prefer to spend a holiday by the sea, in which case Puri on the Bay of Bengal south of Calcutta is the place to go to. It is one of the bright sides of life in Calcutta that the hills are not too far off. You leave the city at about eight in the evening and, while you sleep on the train, you cross the plains of Bengal and the sacred Ganges during the night. Shortly after sunrise the following morning you find yourself within sight of the Himalayas.

I made this trip once in October, and I shall never forget the magnificent view which offered itself to my eyes when, after a comfortable night on the train, I opened the shutters of my sleeping compartment, peeped out of the window, and there in the clear morning light saw in front of me the mighty snow-capped range of the Himalayan mountains rising on the horizon across the verdant Bengal plain over which the train was traveling. I got off at Siliguri, almost at the foot of the hills, and from there took a motorcar which carried me across the most gorgeous mountain scenery till, in about three hours, I was in Darjeeling. This resort is situated on the slope of a hill directly opposite the mighty glacier-covered Kichinjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. In and around Darjeeling there are many tea gardens, and some of the finest teas of the world come from the Himalayan hills.

A sight not to be missed is market day in Darjeeling, when Tibetans and other hill people gather in large numbers in Darjeeling's market square to offer their many wares and at the same time to buy things they need in their far-off mountain villages. It is a colorful crowd of people, different in every respect from the Bengali population of the plains.

NEPAL

Not far from Darjeeling is the border of the independent state of Nepal, which has a total population of five and a half millions, belonging mostly to the Hindu faith. Politically the situation of this small Indian state is unique in that it has managed to remain outside the circle of British-dominated Indian states and that the British Government has officially recognized its independent status.

The Nepalese are a proud and, at the same time, warlike people, and foreigners are not easily admitted into the country. So particular are the Nepalese about the seclusion they enjoy that they do not even permit anyone to traverse the air above their little country without a special permit. There is a permanent British diplomatic mission at Katmandu, the capital of Nepal; but the members of it are probably the only foreigners resident in the state.

Nepal is the home of the famous Ghurka race, who make excellent soldiers; and the Maharajah of Nepal has identified himself with the cause of the Allies by sending regiments of Ghurkas to serve with the British forces in India and overseas. Even during the Great War regiments of Ghurkas fought on the battlefields of France, where they were noted for their death-defying qualities.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Nepal. There is a fair amount of rice in the plains, while tea and tobacco are grown near the hills. Incidentally, tobacco is a fairly important product grown mostly around Rangpur and Jalpaiguri, both of which are in northern Bengal. Before the war much of the tobacco grown here was exported to Burma, where it was turned into the famous Burma cheroots.
Among the many provinces of India, Assam is the one where British rule was established last. Even prior to the British penetration, Assam occupied a unique position in that it managed stubbornly to remain outside the Mogul empire. In this way it maintained a precarious independence, although it was frequently invaded by the Mohammedans, who did not, however, succeed in gaining a permanent foothold there.

In the latter part of the eighteenth century the Burmese temporarily subjected the country to their rule. As the province was at that time considered by the British as belonging to their sphere of interest, controlled by the East India Company, the Burmese incursion led eventually to the first Anglo-Burmese war, at the end of which, in 1826, Assam was ceded to the British.

Assam's principal river is the mighty Brahmaputra, which has a total length of some 2,000 miles. It comes from the highlands of Tibet and flows eastward until it reaches the border of Assam. There it makes a great turn to the southwest and enters the Assam valley, which extends from Sadiya over a distance of 400 miles to the Assam-Bengal border at Dhubri. On entering Bengal, the river turns south and finally joins up with the Ganges near a place called Goalundo. The Assam valley, or Brahmaputra valley, as it is also known, is of considerable width. Its northwestern boundary is formed by the Himalayas and the Bhutan hills, and in the southeast it is bordered by the mountains of the Burma-Assam frontier.

FLOODS AND FERTILITY

Like the Hwang Ho in China, the Brahmaputra has a tendency to change its course. The cause for this is the rapid silting up of the river due to an excessive amount of alluvial matter being carried down by it from the mountains. This leads to obstruction and consequent floods, with the result that the river is forced to divert its course. As on the Hooghly, the pilots navigating the Brahmaputra have to be exceedingly careful to avoid shallow parts and sandbanks, which keep on rising and disappearing according to the state of the river. The inconvenience and danger of this was felt especially in the years before the country was opened up by railways, since at that time the Brahmaputra constituted the only means by which access could be gained to Assam. Even today river traffic is still important.

The frequent inundations of the Brahmaputra River, especially during the rainy season, are the principal cause for the great fertility of the country. The rich alluvial soil produces all kinds of crops in great rapidity. The main crop of the plain is rice, but a considerable quantity of jute is also grown near Goalpara and Sylhet. Cotton is planted in fairly large quantities along the hill slopes. Whereas these products are cultivated by the native population, the extensive tea gardens of Assam, most of which are located in the Assam valley, are almost entirely operated by British interests.

In fact, British planters were the first to start tea-planting in Assam on an organized scale, and today it has developed into a major industry of the country. The total annual output of tea amounts to about 225 million pounds, of which two thirds come from estates in the Brahmaputra valley. The quality of the tea ranks among the best in the world. Attracted by the prospects of considerable profits in the tea business, British settlers were the first to come to Assam in the course of the last century and to open up a country which, until fairly recent times, was more or less terra incognita.

Compared with the tea industry, the mineral resources of the province are of lesser importance. Coal is mined in the Mukum fields situated near the Patkai Hills, but the output cannot be compared with the rich yield of the coal mines of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. Similarly there is a certain amount of petroleum extracted at Bardapur on the Barak
River in the Cachar district, but the production is likewise fairly small.

ASSAM’S CLIMATE AND POPULATION

The rainy season generally starts in March and continues throughout April and May, but there is no season which is entirely free from rain, in contrast to certain parts of Central India. The average annual rainfall recorded in Assam amounts to 424 inches, which makes Assam the country with the heaviest rainfall in the world.

Including the various feudatory states of which the province is composed and of which Manipur State is the most important one, Assam has a total population of nearly 10 million people. About 56 per cent of these belong to the Hindu faith, 30 per cent are Mohammedans, and 11 per cent are animists. Most of the latter are to be found among the various hill tribes.

The native population of the province are the Assamese, who are predominantly Hindu by faith and who are of Mongolian stock. They are much lighter in color than the Bengalis. On the whole they cannot be called an attractive people. They are definitely not a martial race; indeed, they are rather phlegmatic and hard to upset. The majority of the Assamese form the community of ryots (small landowners), and they are mostly engaged in the cultivation of rice and other agricultural products, which they grow only for their own needs and only just as much as they require. Even higher pay is no inducement for them to work on European tea plantations, with the result that the tea planters have to recruit their estate labor from among the immigrant population, mostly natives from Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.

CHITTAGONG—ALLIED MILITARY BASE

On the coast of the Bay of Bengal, in the eastern part of Bengal Province and not far from the Burma border, lies the port of Chittagong. In peace time, some of the produce of Assam is shipped from this port, though most of it goes to Calcutta direct for shipment overseas. Chittagong has, however, always been of great importance in the coastal shipping trade between Burma, Bengal, and the ports of the East Indian coast. Politically speaking, it has for years been a center of extreme Indian nationalism. Though the British have done everything in their power to suppress the unrest which has flared up at regular intervals, they have never been quite successful, and Chittagong is still the center of Indian revolutionary activities. One of the more serious incidents of recent years was the raid on the Chittagong armory by the Swarajists, when violent fighting occurred between British military forces and the revolutionaries.

It is this city which, after the loss of Burma, the British had to turn into their principal military base.

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The establishment of a “Burma Road of the air” (from Calcutta via Dibrugarh on the Brahmaputra to Chungking) has proved wholly inadequate from the point of view of quantities transported. And the construction of a road from Sadiya, at the terminus of the railway in the upper Brahmaputra valley, to Chungking has so far been frustrated by the gigantic mountain ranges and river canyons. So there remains nothing for the British to do but to try and wrest Burma from the Japanese.

Quite aside from the resistance offered them by the Japanese armies, the geography of the Indo-Burmese border areas is an ally of the defenders. These areas are so hard to penetrate that large bodies of troops can be moved only along the narrow coastal strip between the Arakan Yomas and the sea, the route that was also taken by the British more than a century ago when they conquered Burma. Another possibility would be an Allied attack upon Burma by sea. This attempt, however, is made extremely difficult by the loss of the British supremacy of the sea in the eastern Bay of Bengal and, above all, by the loss of Singapore, a loss which is turning out more and more to be of decisive importance.