

STORY OF BURMA.

First Round—Japan.

(By "Recorder.")

The recapture of Maungdaw, a small but important supply base on the narrow gulf just east of the India-Burma frontier, attracts interest again to the Southern Asian theatre. Four and a half months of dry weather remain before the wet monsoonal season returns in June to make all but minor operations impracticable.

Those who have not closely followed the communiques and war correspondents' accounts from the South East Asian front during the past 15 months will be surprised to know that Allied forces composed of British, Indian, American, Chinese, Kachin and Australian troops and British and American airmen have during those 15 months been actually winning the Battle of Burma.

The Japanese occupied Burma firstly because it provided the eastern counterpart of the famous western gateway to India at Bombay, and secondly because it abounded with many of the most urgently-needed commodities for the Japanese home and war fronts, including rice, oil, lead, tungsten and wolfram.

There are four and only four practicable routes for an army to invade India from Burma. Two of them are in the extreme north, one in the central west and the other across the Bay of Bengal. The reasons are bound up with the wild mountain jungles and correspondingly few effective communications of the country.

All these communications, with the exception of two railway lines in central Burma, run north and south following the great rivers of Burma—the Salween and Sittang in the



east, the Irrawaddy in the centre and the Chindwin in the north-west. Most of the communications converge on Rangoon, the only port of any practical use for large-scale shipping.

Enemy Exploitation.

Immediately upon occupation of Burma just before the wet season of 1942-43 the Japanese, according to their wont, set about their task like beavers. They moved into the extreme north and built up supplies ready to exploit the two routes to the Calcutta-Sadiya railway. They moved up the Chindwin River from Mandalay into the Chin Hills in central-West Burma and prepared for a drive against the British East Indian base of Imphal, from which runs a road to the Calcutta-Sadiya railway. They began to develop the south-west Burma village of Akyab as a base for amphibious operations against Cox's Bazaar, Chittagong and Calcutta.

Lastly they began to plunder or harness the wealth of Burma and convert it ostensibly to the use of the Japanese Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Plan, but actually to the use of the Japanese war effort.

Rice for the hungry millions of Japan, always dependent upon imports for their staple diet, was derived from the lazy, acquiescent Burmese ricegrower. Lead from Central-East Burma was brought down one of the two east-west railways and dispatched via Rangoon and Singapore to the Japanese Empire, together with oil from the Kadang oilfields. Wolfram and tungsten for explosives were obtained from the Lower Burma and Tennasserim coast.

Burma, so far, was proving a definite asset to Japan. A definite change was soon to cloud the scene.

SECOND ROUND—THE ALLIES.

The Allies were not idle while the Japanese were completing their schemes. They struck just before the wet June-October monsoon season. Sturdy and fierce Kachin mountain tribesmen from north-west Burma, who hated the Japanese, had already been organised and



west Burma, who hated the Japanese, had already been organised and trained. They were helped by the British to raid and destroy the main Japanese supply bases in northern Burma. British Brigadier Wingate trained and led a brigade group of some of the most spartan soldiers of any age through the jungle mountains of NW Burma to cut and render useless no less than 90 miles of the all-important railway running north from Mandalay to Myitkyina (pronounced "Mich-ina"). Living on the country with the guidance of the Kachins and on supplies dropped by airmen at rendezvous in the jungle, braving the deadly malaria and leech-poisoning, they carried out their mission. The survivors returned, most of them by the way they had come, others, who were cut off, via Yunnan Province and Chungking and then by plane to India.

Other troops from Imphal pushed deep into the Chin Hills, disrupting communications and playing the merry devil with Japanese preparations along the Chindwin. Lastly, British troops fought grimly down the south-west (Arakan) Coast of Burma and with the help of the RAF and USAAF seriously jeopardised any prospects the enemy had of using Akyab and Ramree Island as offensive bases for sea attempts against Bengal.

Most of these campaigns were conducted immediately prior to the monsoonal season, during which yards of rain fall in Burma, the driest spot being Mandalay, which itself averages over three yards during the wet season. Akyab discontents itself with approximately eight yards, so repairs during the months from June to December are out of the question.

Aerial Offensive.

Also timed to coincide with the approach of the wet season were Allied air attacks on vital strategic targets in Burma. Rangoon was put out of commission as a port a few weeks before the mud floods of the Irrawaddy precluded all hopes of repair for months. The central girder of a bridge, which crosses a river on the only communication from the important lead mines, went to the bottom of the gorge it helped to span a week before the rains came. The oil wells of Kadang were also satisfactorily treated.

Today, Japanese plans for Burma appear to be strictly defensive. The Japanese chance to interfere with the Indian problem has vanished. Isolated aerial attacks are being made on advanced Allied bases and the Japanese are completing a railway from Rangoon via Moulmein and the Tennasserim coast through the one pass in the mountains to the

the one pass in the mountains to the Thailand capital, Bangkok. This railway is of great strategic importance, as to a certain extent it replaces the sea route around Malaya and Singapore to the China Sea. Like many Japanese works in the South-West Pacific, however, it may eventually prove of greater benefit to the Allies than to its creators.
