

GENERAL SLIM VICTOR OF BURMA

Sense Of Comradeship And Shared Danger With Troops

MMUCH has been written, and deservedly so, of the exploits of the Fourteenth Army of the Commander who led from the black days of 1943 to the victories of 1944-45, the world knows less. Some generals have encouraged publicity for themselves in the belief a general known intimately to the world becomes more of a personal leader to his troops and inspires them with a personal affection. Others rely on the sense of comradeship, which comes from effort and dangers shared and from continual contact with troops they command.

Lieut.-General Sir William Slim is of the latter class. That he has succeeded is shown by the fact that for those who know him and have served under him he personifies resolute purpose, staunch endurance and the offensive spirit of the army he commands. In years to come when men speak of Burma they will remember not only the Fourteenth Army, but also the great general who commands it. There is not a man in this army who would not follow "Uncle Bill" Slim anywhere.

War in Burma manifested in miniature the stages through which the greater war in Europe and Africa passed. It has had its Dunkirk—when weary columns, defeated but never broken, made their way back over jungle tracks from Burma to refit for further struggles. It has had its period of grim defensive warfare of constant small but fierce actions along borders of India—a period during which it was gaining all the time in wisdom and technique and establishing a moral and actual superiority over its enemy. It has had its Alamein dash when Japanese threw themselves against Imphal, Kohima, and were driven back in disorder after months of bloody fighting by the gallantry and doggedness of British and Indian troops. And at last it has had its triumph, when the Fourteenth Army surged forward and by daring strategy of its leader and offensive spirit of its troops routed its enemy and destroyed him utterly.

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Throughout all this time the burden and responsibility lay on the shoulders of one man. It is a burden which few men could have borne. And few indeed could have retained throughout it the vitality and daring which enabled Slim when the time came to launch a campaign whose boldness and speed startled the world as much as it did the Japanese.

PATTERN OF SKILL

The Burma victory 1944-45 will live in military history as a pattern of skill, resourcefulness and dash. In distance, in speed, and in hardships, and in overwhelming success it compares with Montgomery's advance from Alamein to Tunis. But resources with which it was fought bear no relation to those on which Montgomery could call. Slim has been denied the accession of fresh forces and equipment which he expected. He fought with what he had—a force which had already fought for years in hard jungle conditions, and which was equipped for jungle fighting where two miles a day is swift progress.

With this force he broke out from the jungle; forced strongly held crossings over the great Irrawaddy River, which is wider than the Rhine; marshalled great secrecy over a three hundred mile jungle track, a mobile armored force which by its break through to Meiktila encircled the Japanese Fifteenth Army and en-

through to Meiktila enabled the Japanese Fifteenth Army and enabled it to be broken up and destroyed as a fighting force; and, finally he organised a break through and pursuit which carried the Fourteenth Army a further three hundred miles south to within a few miles of Rangoon. The

speed and weight of this thrust paralysed the enemy's attempts to re-organise and forced him to uncover his defences of Rangoon, allowing the port to be captured without opposition by seaborne force.

This is the spectacular side of the medal. But there were earlier days less glamorous but equally important, which alone would give Slim a place among the great leaders of the war. The days when he formed his army at first pitifully small to keep the all-conquering Japanese out of India. The years when he and his army stood and threw back all attempts of the enemy to force them to retreat. Perhaps Slim's greatest feat was that from the first he refused to allow his troops to subdue their aggressive spirit; by insisting from the start on offensive action he drove out the fear of the Japanese as a jungle wizard, and built up among his troops that confidence in their superiority over the Japanese, which is so evident among British and Indian troops today.

Slim has the honor not only of having won the Burma victory, but of having forged the weapon by which achieved it. He has in addition the unbounded admiration and devotion of every man of his army.