

## ARAKAN AND THE FIRST ANGLO-BURMESE WAR, 1824-25

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THE prominence given to the British operations in Arakan during 1824-43 serves to remind us that the India-Burma coastal plain from Chittagong to Akyab and south to Ramree and Cheduba Islands was the scene of a difficult campaign during the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1824-25. In the current operations, as in the advance more than 100 years ago, the greatest difficulties are those of transport and supply. These are due to the fact that the entire region is highly malarious, deeply interlaced by a maze of tidal creeks and estuaries, and that it consists of a series of jungle clad parallel ridges and river valleys, which lie directly across the desired line of advance. In fact, except for the ridges, the area bears a striking resemblance to the Pearl River estuary between Canton and the sea.

Politically and historically Arakan was at various times an independent kingdom of some extent and power prior to its conquest in 1784-85 by Bodawpaya, son of Alaungpaya, who founded the last dynasty of kings in Burma proper. Bodawpaya removed the *Mahamuni* image of Buddha to the Mandalay area as recorded in Maurice Collis's recent book *The Land of the Great Image*. At one time the kingdom of Arakan included Chittagong and some adjacent districts, while the hill states of Tripura and the petty states now included in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were feudatories. As overlords of Arakan the Burmese claim to some considerable area north of the Naf River is therefore understandable on somewhat shadowy historic grounds. It will be noted that whereas the town of Akyab did not exist as a place of importance during the war of a century ago, it is the objective of the current operations as the center of a rich rice exporting area. On the other hand, in 1824 Myohaung (Old Town) was the capital of Arakan. As the seat of the Burmese Viceroy and garrisons it was the principal objective of the Arakan campaign of 1824-25. The place is now almost forgotten although a Japanese garrison has been reported as living in the ruins of the old palace of the King of Arakan. Curiously, the first Japanese known to have visited Arakan was captain of a ship which arrived in 1630.

As a result of conflicting claims to the territory in the general area of the present India-Burma frontier, Anglo-Burmese relations deteriorated steadily during the two decades prior to the outbreak of the first war. Troubles in

Arakan, Manipur, Assam, Cachar and ill treatment of European traders in Rangoon were all points of friction leading to the final outbreak of hostilities,<sup>1</sup> and although the Governor-General in Council did not notify a state of war with Burma until the 5th March 1824, hostilities along the frontier in both Arakan and Assam had commenced before that date. On the 24th September 1823 a guard of sepoy's stationed on the island of Shahpuri, at the mouth of the Naf River which then as now formed the boundary between Arakan and Chittagong, had been attacked and several of them killed. The island was soon re-occupied, without resistance, but shortly afterwards conflicts occurred in Assam also. Early in 1824 the Burmese general Maha Bandula assembled a large force in Arakan; and Shahpuri, which had again been abandoned, this time on the score of its unhealthiness, was once more seized by the Burmese, while the commander and another officer of an East India Company's ship who had been invited ashore at Maungdaw were imprisoned. According to Burmese accounts the kidnapping of these officers was warmly disapproved by Bandula, and it is certainly the case that they were soon released; but no apology was offered. These various events produced the proclamation of war.

The military policy adopted was to drive the Burmese forces out of the territories which they had recently occupied in Assam, but otherwise to adopt only a defensive attitude on the frontier both there and in Chittagong; the main drive was to be made by sea, against Rangoon and the Irrawaddy Valley. The Burmese, however, aiming at the conquest of the whole of Bengal, were not content to adopt a passive role, and with this end in view they had already concentrated their forces under Bandula at Mrohaung, which was then the capital of Arakan, Akyab being only a small fishing village. The energetic policy which Bandula adopted caused the Company's forces to sustain a severe check on the Chittagong front at an early stage. There were in that area about 3,000 troops, *viz.* the left wing of the 2/13th Bengal N.I.,<sup>2</sup> five companies of the 2/20th B.N.I., the 1/23rd B.N.I., the Chittagong Provincial Battalion (a local force resembling to some extent such bodies as

<sup>1</sup> The background of the disputes is well summarized in A. C. Banerjee, *The eastern frontier of British India* (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee, 1943). Other sources of information are H. H. Wilson, *Documents illustrative of the Burmese War* (Calcutta, 1827); San Shwe Bu, "The Arakan Mug Battalion," *Journal of the Burma Research Society*, 13 (August, 1923), 129; Maung Boon, "The First Burmese War," *JBR*, 13 (December, 1923), 261; M. S. Collis, "Campbell Robertson in Arakan," *JBR*, 13 (December, 1923), 257; B. R. Pearn, "King Bering," *JBR*, 23 (August, 1933), p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> That is, the second battalion of the 13th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry. In this paper, B.N.I. and M.N.I. are used for Bengal Native Infantry and Madras Native Infantry respectively. These native regiments were forces of the East India Company. The Maghs, or Mugs, were descendants of Arakanese men and Chittagoman women; they were always Buddhists. In Chittagong, the term is applied generally to the Buddhist residents of Arakan, as distinct from the Moslems.

the Assam Rifles and the Burma Military Police of to-day), and a Magh Levy which had been formed only a few months before from Arakanese who had fled to Chittagong from Arakan as a result of Burmese oppression. These troops were concentrated at Chittagong town, but a detachment of five companies of the 1/23rd, part of the Provincial Battalion and part of the Magh Levy, with two guns, was holding an advance post at Ramu.

On the Burmese side, Bandula himself remained at Mrohaung, but most of his men were sent forward under the command of Maung Wa, an *Atrwin-wun* or Minister, part proceeding up the Mayu River through Letwedet, near Buthidaung, and part along the coast through Alethangyaw. Early in May, 1824, they crossed the Naf. A British post on the river reported this advance, which was not at first credited, but the report was soon confirmed by the startling news that the Burmese had occupied Ratnapallang, fourteen miles south of Ramu.

Captain Noton, commanding at Ramu, decided to attack the Burmese position; leaving at Ramu the convalescents of the 1/23rd, the whole of the Provincials, and about a hundred Maghs, he marched out of Ramu on the evening of the 11th May with the rest of his detachment, including the two 6-pounder guns. It was found that the Burmese had occupied the hills overlooking the road on the east side, and although Captain Noton was able to advance past these hills towards the stockade which had been thrown up at Ratnapallang, a good deal of difficulty was experienced in bringing up the guns owing to the inexperience of the mahouts who drove the elephants; the Maghs, moreover, showed themselves very unsteady under the fire of the enemy. Sporadic firing went on all night round the stockade, and in the morning, the ammunition coolies having deserted and the guns thus being unserviceable, Captain Noton withdrew to Ramu, with a loss of seven missing and eleven wounded. At Ramu he was now joined by three companies of the 2/20th B.N I.

On the 13th morning the Burmese, encouraged by their success, advanced from Ratnapallang and occupied the hills east of Ramu across the river which flows by the town; they burnt the villages and killed the cattle in the neighborhood. The strength of the Burmese force was estimated at 10,000, including 200 cavalry, apart from followers. Captain Noton had about 350 regulars, about 250 Provincials, and about 400 Maghs. Despite the disparity in strength, Captain Noton resolved to hold Ramu, for he was confident that further reinforcements would arrive from Chittagong. During the 14th May, the two 6-pounder guns prevented the Burmese from crossing the river, but on the 15th morning they managed to effect a crossing unobserved higher

up the stream, and took possession of a tank near the British position.<sup>3</sup> The British encampment was surrounded by a three-foot embankment, and was protected on its right flank by the river; some sixty paces in advance of the right flank was another tank, which was held by a picket; and in the left rear was also a tank, held by a strong post of Provincials and Maghs. The enemy made good use of natural cover and despite constant firing had no difficulty in strengthening his hold on the tank in front of the position; and on this day, the 15th, the local forces again showed signs of unsteadiness. On the 16th morning it was found that the enemy had pushed forward, entrenching himself closer to the British lines; heavy firing continued all day, and although the Burmese appear to have had no artillery they maintained their position; in the evening the Provincials were barely prevented from deserting to the enemy. Captain Noton now considered withdrawing, but he had received information which led him to expect the reinforcements from Chittagong next day, and he finally decided to hold on. Firing went on all night, and in the morning the enemy, who had been strengthened by the arrival of fresh troops, was entrenched within thirty yards of the picket at the tank; and shortly after dawn succeeded, again by the skilful use of cover, in advancing and entrenching only twelve paces distant. The tank in the left rear was now closely invested, and at about 9 or 10 A.M. the Provincials and Maghs took to flight—though according to Arakanese accounts they withdrew along with the wounded and the treasure by order of the officer commanding. The elephants also took fright and fled. The tank being now in enemy hands and the regulars who remained being too few to hold the position, Captain Noton, with only 400 exhausted men left, ordered a retreat, the guns being abandoned. For about half a mile the retreat was conducted in an orderly manner, but the enemy pressed hard, aided especially by his cavalry, and retreat soon degenerated into rout. When the force reached a river, arms and equipment were precipitately abandoned in the haste to get across, and the whole force disintegrated. The total losses were 250; of six European and three Indian officers only three survived, two of these being wounded. The enemy then advanced and occupied Chakariah, about 20 miles north of Ramu, creating havoc among the villages in the area.

These events produced consternation throughout eastern Bengal; the inhabitants of the district took refuge in Chittagong town, and panic spread as far afield as Calcutta. Reinforcements were at once sent to Chittagong, comprising the 44th Foot of the Royal forces,<sup>4</sup> the 30th B.N.I., and also the 10th and 16th Madras N.I. which were diverted on their way to Rangoon. A

<sup>3</sup> A pond surrounded by a low embankment of earth is generally called a tank in India and Burma.

<sup>4</sup> This was a regular British Army unit; the others were part of the forces of the East India Company.

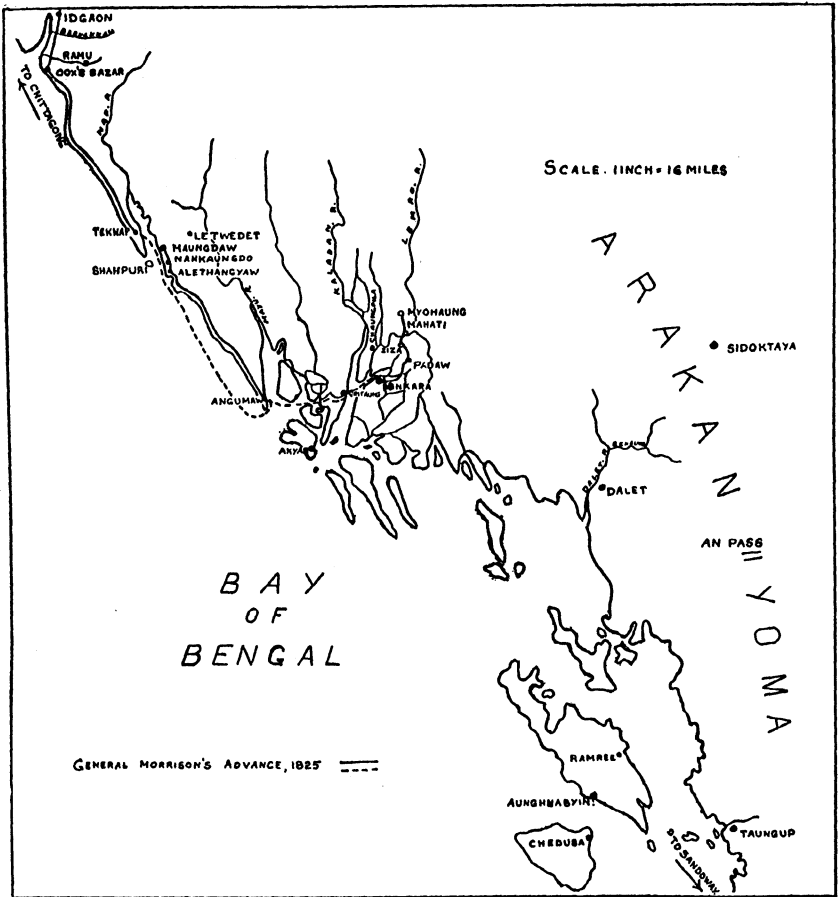
detachment from Sylhet, in Assam, was also ordered to Chittagong. The Burmese, however, showed no disposition to follow up their advantage and as they soon withdrew to Ramu and their effort was then confined to patrols westwards to Cox's Bazaar and forward to Baruakhali and Idgaon, the bulk of their force remaining at Ramu, the orders to the Sylhet detachment were cancelled.

Operations along the Arakan coast, on the other hand, were more successful. During the very days of the Ramu disaster a combined force had occupied the island of Cheduba. The transports arrived off the creek leading to the town of Cheduba on the 12th May. According to local report a small vessel in the guise of a merchantman had been sent to the town and had succeeded in obtaining full information about the defenses. On the 14th May 300 infantry went up the creek in boats, easily occupied a stockade about a mile up, entered the town and went forward to a second stockade beyond it. This was occupied after guns had been landed from the ships. On the 19th the Governor of Cheduba was captured by a patrol, most of his troops escaping to the mainland. A detachment of the 20th B.N.I. was left to hold the island, and a sloop was also stationed there. The rest of the force proceeded to Rangoon.

Early in June a minor action took place off Maungdaw, which again was the scene of action in 1842-43. When the Company's ship *Vestal* reached the British post at Tek Naf, on the Chittagong side of the Naf River, on the 3rd of the month, it was found that the sepoys there, now cut off from their base by the Burmese advance to Ramu, had mutinied rather than oppose the enemy troops who were surrounding the stockade; the subadar commanding had therefore spiked the guns and thrown the ammunition into a well, but the sepoys would not permit him to destroy the musket cartridges; he then took refuge on the *Vestal* and the Burmese occupied the post. The *Vestal* crossed to Maungdaw where about a hundred war-boats were encountered; after ten minutes' firing these withdrew up the Maungdaw creek, pursued by two gun-boats. The *Vestal* then went to Shahpuri and bombarded the Burmese stockade there. About a dozen Burmese boats were sunk in these operations.

The failure of the Burmese to follow up the victory gained at Ramu was due to the misfortunes which had attended their arms elsewhere; these misfortunes were so serious as to require their complete withdrawal from the Chittagong district within a very few weeks. On the 11th May the main British expeditionary force had occupied Rangoon, and when the news became known the Burmese Government recalled Maha Bandula to deal with the situation. Withdrawing most of his men, he made a forced march over

the An Pass, in the worst of weather, to the Irrawaddy Valley. His orders to his subordinates were to concentrate at Mrohaung, leaving only posts at Maungdaw, Nahkaungdo and Letwedet, on the Burmese side of the frontier. At Ramu there were about 200 Burmese wounded, and these were all killed



lest they should fall into British hands and give information. This withdrawal appears to have taken place in late June or early July.

For the whole of the rainy season of 1824 operations on the Chittagong front were suspended, for the wild and inhospitable nature of the country, and its unhealthiness, were held to make movement in the rains almost impossible. What the country was like at that season of the year is well illustrated by an account given by an officer of a march along the coast from Chittagong to Tek Naf in 1811. He writes, "The distance from Chittagong

to Teck Nauf is about one hundred and forty miles. The cultivation of the province can only be said to extend to Ramoo, from whence it is circumscribed to Cox's Bazaar by mountainous forests. The communication between Cox's Bazaar and Teck Nauf lies along the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal, the passage on the sands of the shore, in some parts impassable but at the ebb of the tide, and during the whole space the mountains covered with forests stretch into the sea. . . . The distance along this dreary and desolate coast, from Cox's Bazaar to Teck Nauf, is sixty miles. It is intercepted with innumerable small rivers, part of which were crossed upon rafts constructed on the spot, and the others forded at the ebb of the tide. Not a hut or a blade of grass was to be seen the whole of way—or was water to be procured but from the mountain currents which are extremely pernicious. There is scarcely space to pitch a tent along the whole line of the coast. . . . Herds of wild buffaloes sometimes threatened to dispute the passage, but took fright on our near approach. The roaring of the sea, and the trumpeting of the wild elephants at night, rendered it truly awful. . . . The detachment marched in June, the period when the rainy season commences, and which is heavier in Chittagong than in any other part of Bengal, it sometimes falling in torrents, without intermission, for four or five and twenty days together, so that the whole country is completely inundated. . . . On the third day's march the rains began, and continued the whole of the journey; the men wading up to their bodies in water until they reached the coast. When the detachment arrived at its destination, Teck Nauf, half the men had been left on the coast unable to keep up. The detachment was immediately attacked with a malignant jungle fever peculiar to the country, which in a few days reduced it to about twenty men capable of doing duty."

At the end of the rains, however, orders were given to assemble a force at Chittagong for the invasion of Arakan; the intention was to advance on Mrohaung, destroy the Burmese force there, and then cross the mountains of the Arakan Yoma to link up with Sir Archibald Campbell's force which was to advance from Rangoon up the Irrawaddy Valley. The Barrackpore Mutiny and the unusual prolongation of the rainy season, which hindered the construction of a road from Chittagong to the Naf, delayed operations, and not till the end of December was the force in a position to move. The division which was to move into Arakan comprised a total of 9,932 men, made up of 600 of the 2nd Bengal Light Horse, 650 artillerymen from the Bengal and Madras artillery units with twelve 9-pounders, four 12-pounders and four 5-inch howitzers, the 44th and 54th Foot<sup>5</sup> of the Royal Forces, the 26th,

<sup>5</sup> Now the 1st Bn, The Essex Regiment, and the 2nd Bn, The Dorsetshire Regiment, respectively.

42nd, 49th and 62nd B.N.I., the 10th and 16th Madras N.I., the 2nd Bengal Light Infantry, 553 of the Magh Levy and 649 Pioneers, the whole being under the command of Brigadier-General J. W. Morrison, 44th Foot. The land force was supported by Commodore (afterwards Sir John) Hayes, of the East India Company's Marine Service, with one 10-gun brig, five 6-gun brigs, two armed surveying vessels, a ketch, one steam gun-vessel, two pinnaces each armed with two guns, and eighty gun-boats each carrying a 12-pounder carronade. Attached to the force as Political Agent was Mr. T. C. Robertson, District Magistrate of Chittagong,<sup>6</sup> who had effected the collection of boats and of baggage-porters from among the local Maghs. A number of Magh elders accompanied Mr. Robertson.

Although some of the supplies and baggage-cattle were still to come, the advance from Chittagong was begun, on the 1st January 1825, along the shore to Cox's Bazaar, the flotilla accompanying the force. From Cox's Bazaar it was possible either to continue along the coast to the Naf estuary or to strike inland and reach the Naf higher up its course. The bad weather had delayed the construction of the coastal road, but the presence of the flotilla eased the problems of supplies and river-crossing, whereas there was no accurate knowledge of the interior road except that it led over mountainous country which would provide serious obstacles for the artillery and the baggage-cattle. It had therefore been resolved to follow the coast, difficult as the route was. Progress was slow, and it took three weeks to reach the banks of the Naf. This advance, however, produced a prompt withdrawal of the Burmese forces from Maungdaw and their other forward positions, their guns being abandoned. According to local accounts the people of Maungdaw brought this information to the British but the report was received with scepticism until a reconnaissance forward gave confirmation; it is also said that the Burmese burnt all their stores before withdrawing. Official records state that part of the British force was directed to land at Maungdaw and storm the stockades there while part was to land lower down the coast to cut off fugitives, but that on the first landing the Burmese withdrew over the mountains through Letwedet (the Japanese retired along the same route in 1942), leaving their stores intact; no resistance was offered, but an attempted pursuit failed to intercept the retreating enemy. Maungdaw was thus occupied on the 1st February.

It was found that the Arakanese were well-disposed and anxious to be of assistance; a proclamation was issued by the General commanding, on the

<sup>6</sup> Robertson is remembered as the author of *Political incidents of the first Anglo-Burmese War* (London, 1853).



advice of the Political Agent, promising good treatment and warning the Arakanese against aiding the Burmans.

It took several days to ferry the force and its baggage over the Naf estuary and not till the 12th February was the advance through Arakan commenced. It was possible to go from Maungdaw through Letwedet and down the Valley of the Mayu River but the route along the coast was preferred. A road was cut, which still exists, along the foot of the Mayu range on the west, from Maungdaw to Angumaw at the mouth of the Mayu River, by Chittagonian and Arakanese labor; but part of the force was sent by sea *viz.* the 54th Foot, the 10th and part of the 16th M.N.I. The 44th Foot, four companies of the 42nd and five of the 62nd B.N.I., a battery of artillery, the 2nd Local Horse, the 2nd Light Infantry Battalion, and the rest of the 16th M.N.I., constituted the force moving by land, with apparently the Maghs and the Pioneers. The remaining troops were left at Maungdaw to bring up the supplies, part of which still lagged beyond the Naf. The gun-boats conveying the detachment going by sea had to put back to Maungdaw under stress of weather, with loss of much equipment though no loss of life, and though the land party reached Angumaw on the 22nd February, the sea party did not assemble there till the 27th.

Meanwhile the naval force had suffered a reverse at Chaungpila. A small Burmese force had been driven from an outpost at Sindetnaw, opposite Akyab across the Kaladan estuary, and the ships, piloted by the headman of Peinnechaung from the same neighborhood, had gone up the Kaladan and anchored off Urittaung, at the mouth of the Kin *chaung* opposite Ponnagyun. Boats sent to reconnoitre the river-route leading to Mrohaung reported on the 21st February that a hundred Burmese war-boats with 2,000 men were in the river, and that the local Arakanese were in consequence much perturbed and wanted protection. The Commodore went forward with eight vessels and five gun-boats containing 480 infantry. It was known from information given by Arakanese that there was a strong stockade at Chaungpila (about 28 miles northeast of Akyab on the Pyaungbya river which led to Mrohaung) but it was understood to be held by only a thousand men. If this stockade could be cleared the advance towards Mrohaung would be facilitated. On the 23rd afternoon the stockade was sighted; when the action commenced it was apparent that the position was stronger than had been expected, the ships were fired on from two stockades, not one, and it proved impossible to land the infantry in the face of the enemy's musketry. After two hours' exchange of fire the Commodore decided to drop downstream again, but three of his vessels, the 10-gun brig, a 6-gun brig and a transport,

grounded on the ebbing tide. This was about 5 P.M. The vessels remained aground till 5 in the morning, but were not molested as the Burmese had suffered severely during the bombardment of the stockades. It was later reported that the position was held by three thousand men. The British losses were 4 killed and 31 wounded. No further attempt to take this position was made.

The disadvantages of having adopted the coastal route from Maungdaw were now fully realized. Although an advance through the Mayu valley would have left the Kaladan River to be crossed before Mrohaung could be approached, the force assembled at Angumaw was on the wrong side of not only the Kaladan but also the Mayu estuary, both of which had now to be crossed by boat before the expedition could reach an area that, even with difficulty, was practicable for infantry movement. On the other hand, movement along the coast was doubtless a good deal easier than movement through the mountainous country bordering the Mayu. It was three weeks before General Morrison had finished ferrying his re-assembled force, with the aid of the gun-boats, across the Mayu, through the creeks behind Akyab island, and across the Kaladan to the neighborhood of Hinkara. It had apparently been decided that the advance on Mrohaung must be made by land, for transport by water was intolerably slow, and would also require an assault on the strong position at Chaungpila; so, although the baggage-cattle were still at Angumaw, the advance continued along the south or east bank of the Hinkara (or Sinbyudin) *chaung*. The route, which would lead to the eastern entry to Mrohaung, would not be easy, for it was intersected every few miles by tidal creeks and by low ridges of hills at intervals. Fortunately the weather, though hot, was fine, the creeks were therefore not in flood, and the inhabitants of the district were universally friendly.

The crossing to Hinkara had been effected by the 20th March, and on the 24th a camp was formed on the south bank of the Chabatti(? Sabata) *chaung*, the enemy holding the Padaw hill two miles ahead. So far no resistance at all had been met by the land forces since leaving Chittagong. On the 25th boat and pontoon bridges were thrown across the Chabatti and Wabraing creeks, and on the 26th the main body crossed. The force from this point advanced in four columns, that on the left by boat, but the water in the Sinbyudin *chaung*, the main stream along whose course the advance was made, being too shallow, this column was landed and marched along the river-bank to turn the enemy's right flank. The hill at Padaw was soon cleared, the Burmese being driven from their entrenched positions after an hour's fighting; but the jungly nature of the country obstructed the cavalry and pursuit

was not practicable. The advance continued to the Ziza (or Petha) stream, where as the tide was low, the crossing was at once effected. The Burmese now abandoned the stockades at Chaungpila.

The Burmese position was now at Mahatti, 10 miles south of Mrohaung, around a pagoda on a hill surrounded on three sides by the waters of the Launggyet *chaung* which was fordable only at low water; the banks were steep and the far side was entrenched, the hill itself was stockaded and a party was posted on a slight elevation on the side of the stream nearer the British position. After the fog cleared on the morning of the 27th three companies of the 44th drove in the party on this elevation, and after a preliminary bombardment of the positions on the far side the river was crossed when the tide ebbed. No serious resistance was then made and the hill of Mahatti was at once occupied. The force was now within a few miles of its objective, Mrohaung, and a detachment of Light Horse was able to harry the Burmans sufficiently to prevent their destroying the bridges on the road, for an old road, paved with stone blocks, connected Mahatti with Mrohaung.

On the 28th the position at Mrohaung was reconnoitred and the British forces entered the plain of Parein, not far from the eastern gate of the city.

The Burmese position was a strong one, consisting of "a connected series of stockades, carried along the crest of a range of hills, from 350 to 450 feet high, running parallel for some distance with the town, immediately to the east and south of it, but extending considerably beyond the town, and strengthened by escarpments, abbatis, and masonry, where such means could be advantageously employed. One pass alone, at its northern extremity, led through the hills to the capital, and that was defended by the fire of several pieces of artillery, and about 3,000 muskets. The whole number of the enemy was estimated at about 9,000 men. The ground in front was a long narrow valley entirely clear of underwood, and in depth not wholly out of the range of the enemy's artillery. Along the foot of the hills ran a belt of jungle, which partly screened the advance, and an uninterrupted piece of water extended, serving as a natural fosse; but above these the ground, again, was clear and open, not only to the fire of the defenders, but to the large stones which they precipitated upon the assailants, who attempted to scale the summit."

On the 29th an assault was made on the strongly fortified pass on the north by the light infantry company of the 54th, four companies of the 2nd Light Infantry, and the light infantry companies of the 10th and 16th M.N.I., with the rifle company of the Magh Levy; a support of six companies of the 16th M.N.I. followed. The assault failed and was abandoned after every officer had been wounded.

According to local legend, the Arakanese elders were then called into council; they advised that *Mra Thwin*, the goddess of *Parein*, on whom the fortunes of the struggle depended, had fallen in love with Mr. Robertson, who was a handsome young man, and that the failure of the attack was due to her having been ignored. Mr. Robertson, acting on the elders' advice, then contracted a formal marriage with the goddess at a public ceremony. This marriage is, perhaps not unnaturally, not referred to in any official account of these operations; but the legend is persistent, and it may be that, to hearten the local forces and to discourage the Burmese to whom the news could no doubt be easily communicated, the marriage did take place.

It was now resolved that the key to *Mrohaung* was the *Lethataung* hill, on the east of the city, and after nightfall on the 31st an attack was made accordingly. During the preceding day a battery had been constructed and a heavy bombardment had been maintained on the Burmese position at the pass, so as to divert attention. The assault party, consisting of six companies of the 44th Foot, three of the 26th B.N.I., three of the 49th, 30 dismounted troopers, 30 seamen, and 40 pioneers, had complete success; although it was a moonlit night, their advance was not detected until they were on the hill, which was easily cleared in the confusion which ensued. Early in the morning a 6-pounder was, with difficulty, brought up the hill and under its cover the advance continued. The Burmese were completely demoralized and abandoned the town in panic. It is permissible to speculate whether fear of *Mra Thwin* was a factor in the case.

The land forces had been aided in the capture of *Mrohaung* by a naval landing-party of 250 men and two 24-pounders. The total casualties from the 26th March onwards were 30 killed and 213 wounded. At *Mrohaung* 29 iron and 12 brass guns were taken, and 10 jingals.

According to local report, the city was abandoned to pillage for three days, but on the fourth day orders were issued prohibiting looting on pain of severe punishment; a proclamation was then issued informing the Arakanese that any soldier found taking the wife or daughter of any of the people would be punished, and inviting those who had fled to return. Nothing is said of this in the official records, and since the local report further adds that upon the issue of the proclamation all the people returned to the city, it would appear that the story is highly doubtful; on the other hand, the ancient tradition of war whereby a city taken by assault was liable to pillage may have lingered in the minds of the troops, as, indeed, it had during the Peninsular War in the previous decade; it is worth noting that the 44th had been present at *Badajoz* in 1811.

Although the city was thus taken, the Burmese force was not destroyed; it did, however, disperse. An attempt was made at pursuit, but in only one case was contact established; in that instance a party of the Local Horse overtook a number of the enemy on their way to Dalet, and about three hundred were taken or killed or were drowned in trying to cross a river. Otherwise, the Burmese made their way in scattered parties, to Dalet and so by the An Pass or else up the Lemro River, over the Arakan Yoma to the Irrawaddy Valley.

Shortly after the fall of Mrohaung the island of Ramree was taken. In the previous October an infantry force of 200 from Cheduba had been landed at Aunghlabyin, on the south of Ramree Island, and had destroyed a number of stockades, but no attempt was made to occupy the island. The capture of two Burmans by boats of the Company's frigate *Hastings*, which was then stationed at Cheduba and had been harrying Burmese boats off Ramree, enabled details of the defenses to be ascertained, and at the end of January a combined operation was undertaken on a larger scale, 520 of the 40th N.I. and 48 artillery men with two brigades of guns being embarked at Cheduba on the 29th; contrary winds prevented the flotilla from reaching Ramree harbor till the 2nd February. After a reconnaissance a landing-place was selected and on the following morning, the tide being suitable, the whole force was landed without opposition. A stockade on the creek was taken after a stout resistance; the enemy then took refuge in the jungle whence a galling fire was maintained, additional Burmese troops were brought forward from Ramree town, and the landing-party had to withdraw to its boats with a loss of 6 killed and 24 wounded.

After the taking of Mrohaung a second attempt on Ramree was made on General Morrison's orders by Brigadier-General (afterwards General Sir William) MacBean, with 4 guns, 2 howitzers, 2 mortars, and 16 companies of infantry, *en route* from Mrohaung to Rangoon. There was some initial difficulty in landing as the enemy had driven rows of stakes across the creek which took two hours to clear; this was on the 22nd April. Once the landing had been effected, however, no opposition was encountered and the town and island of Ramree, though both the creek and the town had been fortified with trenches and stockades, were occupied without resistance. Part of the force was then sent to Sandoway; stockades had been erected in this case also at the river-mouth and at various points up the river, but again no opposition was met. The news of the fall of Mrohaung had doubtless disheartened the Burmese.

It was, however, expected that an attempt would be made by the Burmese to regain the lost ground, and indeed a force was assembled to cross the

Arakan Yoma with this object, but the setting in of the rains of 1825 prevented movement, and when the dry season arrived Sir Archibald Campbell's advance up the Irrawaddy Valley rendered such an operation out of the question. Meanwhile, after the occupation of Mrohaung, it was decided to forestall any such attempt by sending a force over the Yoma which should, as had originally been intended, link up with Campbell. A reconnaissance force comprising the light companies of the 44th and 54th Foot and 16th M.N.I., with three companies of the 2nd Bengal Light Infantry, went by water from Mrohaung to Dalet, and leaving there on the 19th May moved, apparently up the Dalet *chaung* and the E *chaung*, through "Poongue Chekayne," "Ghose Chekayne"; "Ye Brang Chekayne," to "Ackowyn," which was reached on the 23rd and was apparently on the top of the Yoma; these places are not identifiable and were probably mere halting-places as the word "Chekayne" (Burmese *sakan*—camp) implies. It was found that the Burmese had a strong post ahead on the road to Sidoktaya, so, with shortage of supplies and severe sickness among the men, the detachment withdrew. The easier route over the An Pass, used by Bandula the previous year, was not then known to the British, though at the conclusion of the war a detachment of British troops crossed the An Pass going westward from the Irrawaddy to Arakan. It was concluded that the plan to link up with Campbell was impracticable; and, in any case, the approach of the rains, and the circumstance that the transport cattle had not yet crossed the Mayu and were to some extent still beyond the Naf, would have rendered an advance in force impossible.

The arrival of the rainy season brought much sickness to the troops in Mrohaung; fever and dysentery were rife, the quality of the supplies provided by the commissariat contractors was poor, and there was excessive drinking among the troops. Finally, all troops had to be withdrawn from Arakan except for detachments maintained at Cheduba, Ramree and Sando-way. The European force, numbering about 1,500, lost, between May and September, 259 men and at the end of September had nearly 400 in hospital; the Indian troops, numbering less than 8,000, lost in the same period 892 and had at the end of it no less than 3,648 in hospital. General Morrison himself died while on his way to England from illness contracted in Arakan.

Simla, 14th January, 1944.