

NAVAL MESSAGE.

UNCLASSIFIED

IMMEDIATE

S. 1320.
(Established—May, 1900.)
(Revised—December, 1901.)

TO:

NOIC RANGOON

FROM:

BURGOVIND

MS 441 96 BURGOV: PLEASE PASS FOLLOWING TO CAPTAIN
LYLE BRNVR FROM GOVERNOR BURMA BEGINS

I REJOICE WITH YOU AND ALL OUR BURMA NAVY AT THE VIC-
TORIOUS CONCLUSION OF THE WAR: THE BURMA RNVR HAS
BEEN IN ACTION FOR A LONG TIME NOW: THEY HAVE WON THE
HIGHEST PRAISE FROM ALL WHO HAVE WITNESSED THEIR
ACTIVITIES FOR THEIR COURAGE RESOLUTION AND SHEER
EFFICIENCY THEY HAVE CREATED A TRADITION FOR BURMA
WHICH I AM SURE THEIR COUNTRY MEN WILL CHERISH AND IT
WILL BE CARRIED ON FOR ALL TIME: WE SALUTE YOU ALL
AND THANK YOU FOR YOUR INSPIRING RECORD: ENDS:

D T G 151120



The photograph shows the interior of the dining room at the Hotel de Ville, Paris, during the 1904 Exposition Universelle.

BURMA R.N.V.R.
RANGOON.

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING OFFICER.

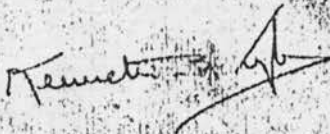
This account of the beginning of the Burma R.N.V.R. and its activities during the war may, I hope, do something to show what the young generation in Burma can achieve. Starting from scratch with few facilities for training, the officers and men of this small but enthusiastic force became expert at the particular type of coastal forces operations which they were required to undertake.

These operations included voyages to places on the coast of Burma in Japanese occupation well behind the enemy's front line. M. L.'s had to keep out of sight of land during daylight and approach the coast on the darkest nights to arrive at their appointed places, which were far away from their base, at exactly the time they were ordered to be there, a performance which would try the skill of seamen of long experience.

Thirty was the maximum number of coastal forces vessels manned by the Burma R.N.V.R. at any time. With the exception of the senior officer of one of the flotillas and the commanding officer of one ship, all were commanded and manned entirely by officers and men recruited from the people of Burma.

These people had produced twenty-eight officers capable of taking command at sea, all the other officers and all the men. The qualities needed to obtain such a result are inherent in the Burmese character: courage, pride, loyalty, cheerfulness in adversity, quick brain and a pronounced spirit of adventure.

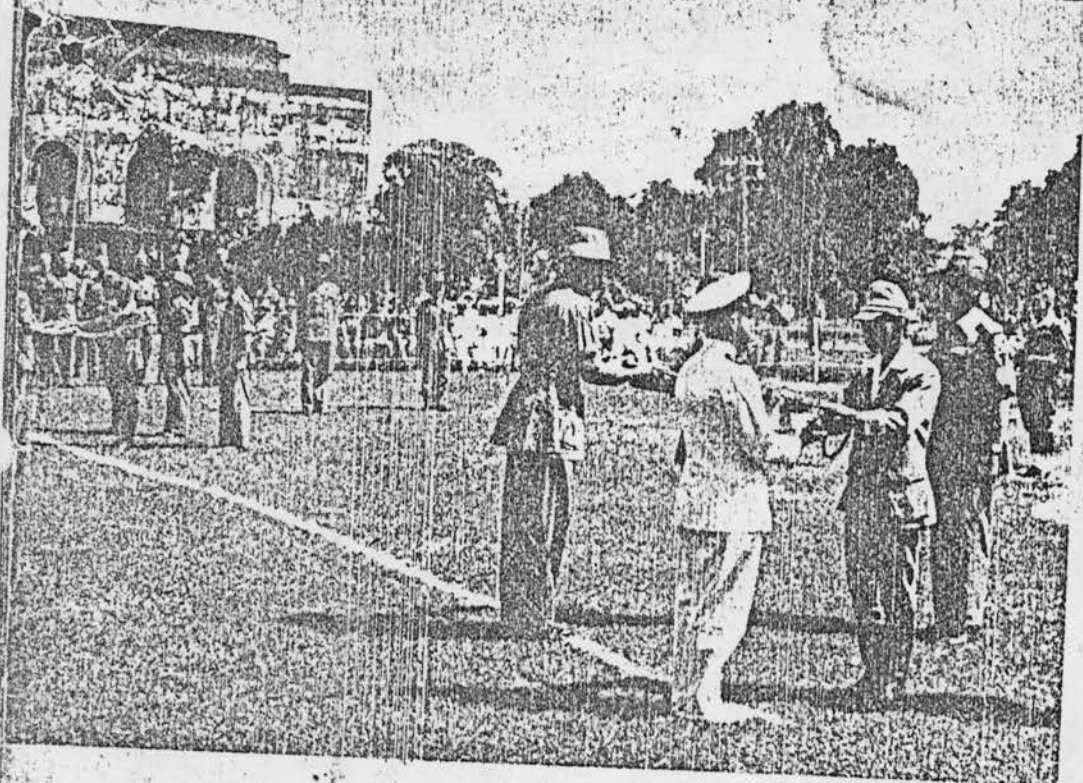
It is these qualities which have made possible the formation of a Navy for Burma by men provided by Burma's own people.



CAPTAIN, ROYAL NAVY.



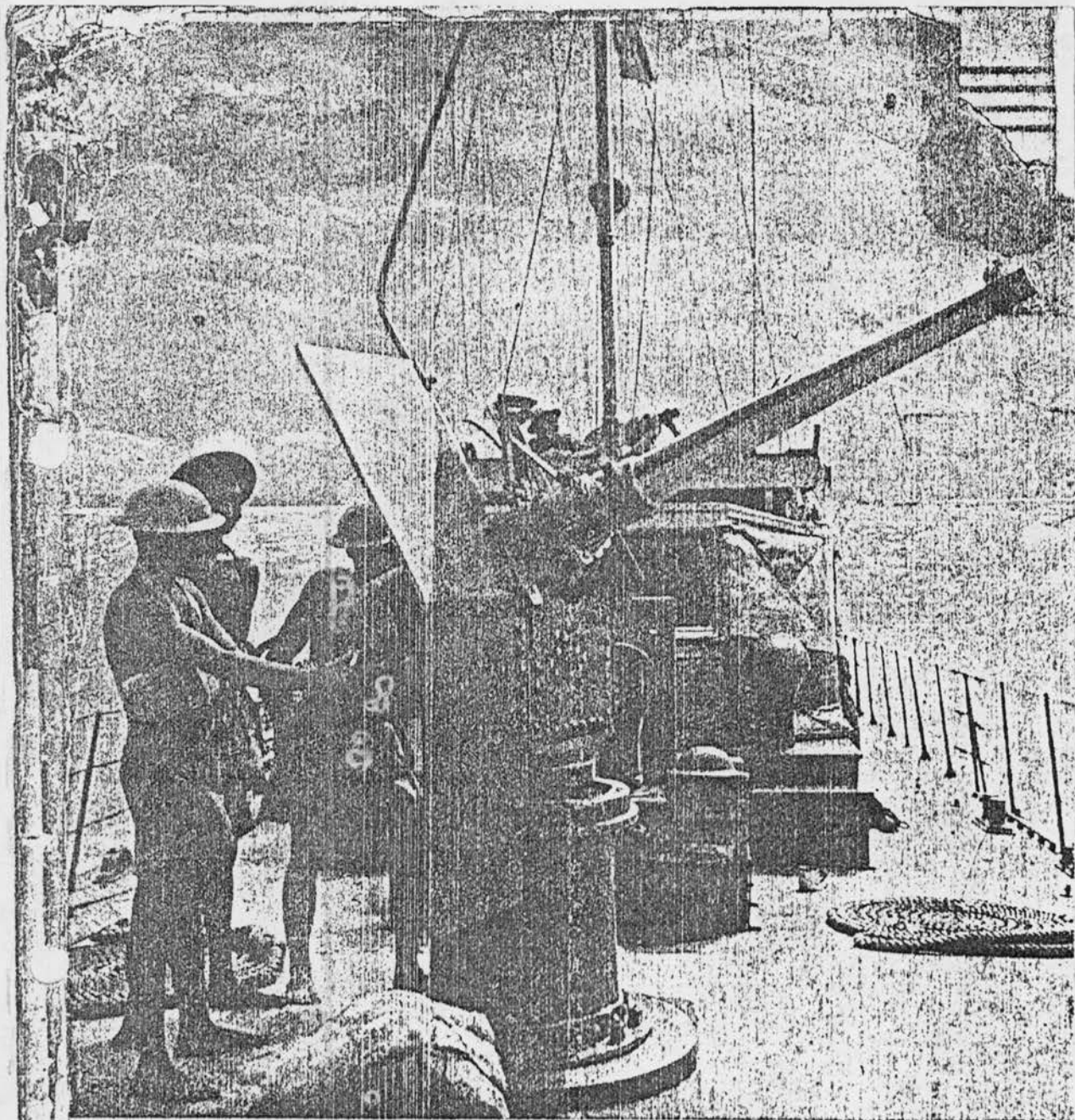
Captain K. S. Lyle R. N.



*Lt. Commander B. Whiteall M.B.E., Burma S. N. V. R., receives the
surrendered sword of the senior Japanese Naval Officer in Burma.*

*Captain K. S.
Lyle, R. N., and
Sub-Lieut. Kyeer
Thein, I. S. V. R.,
Jurmatt, N. A. H.*

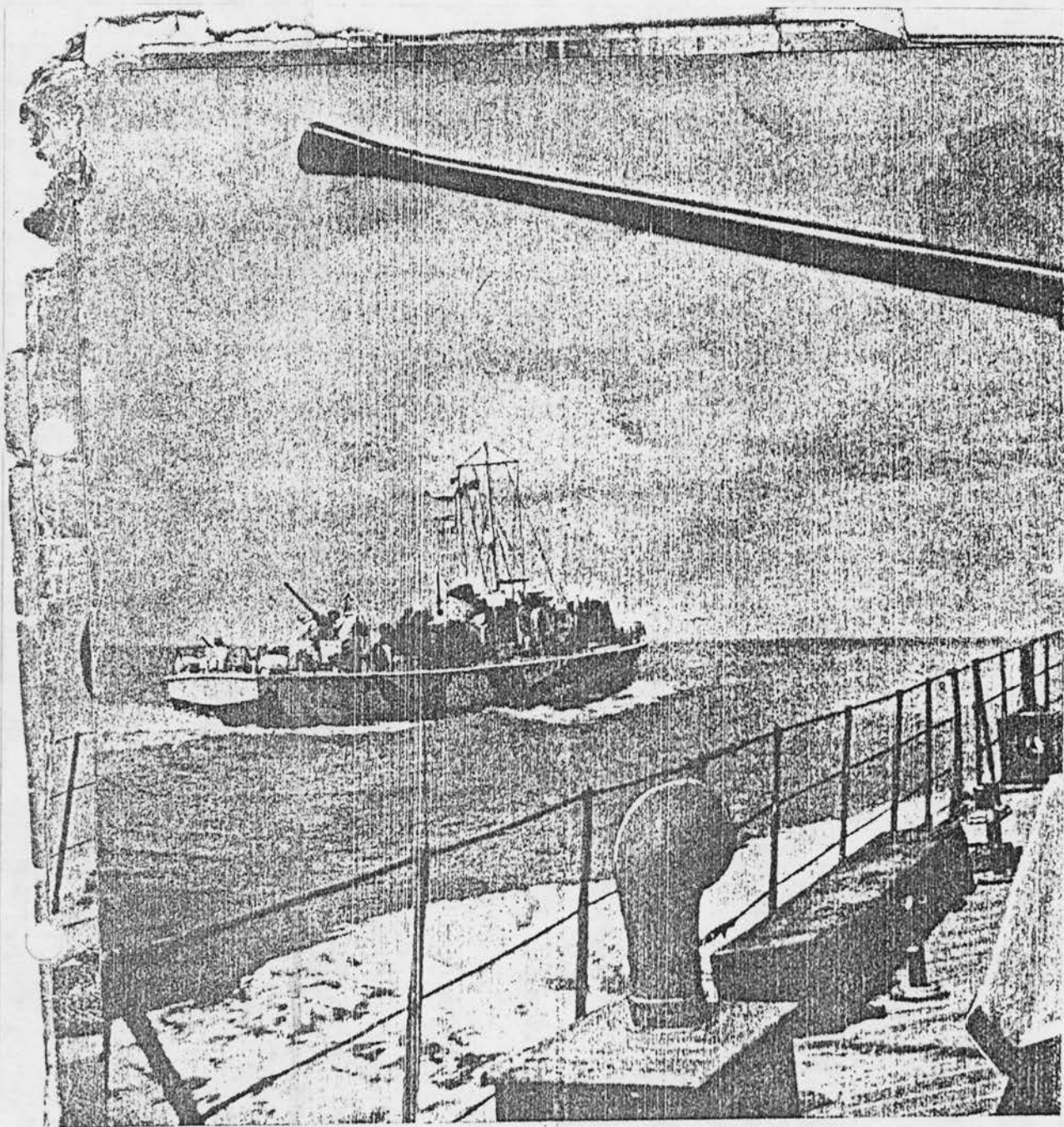




On patrol off the Hornet Coast.

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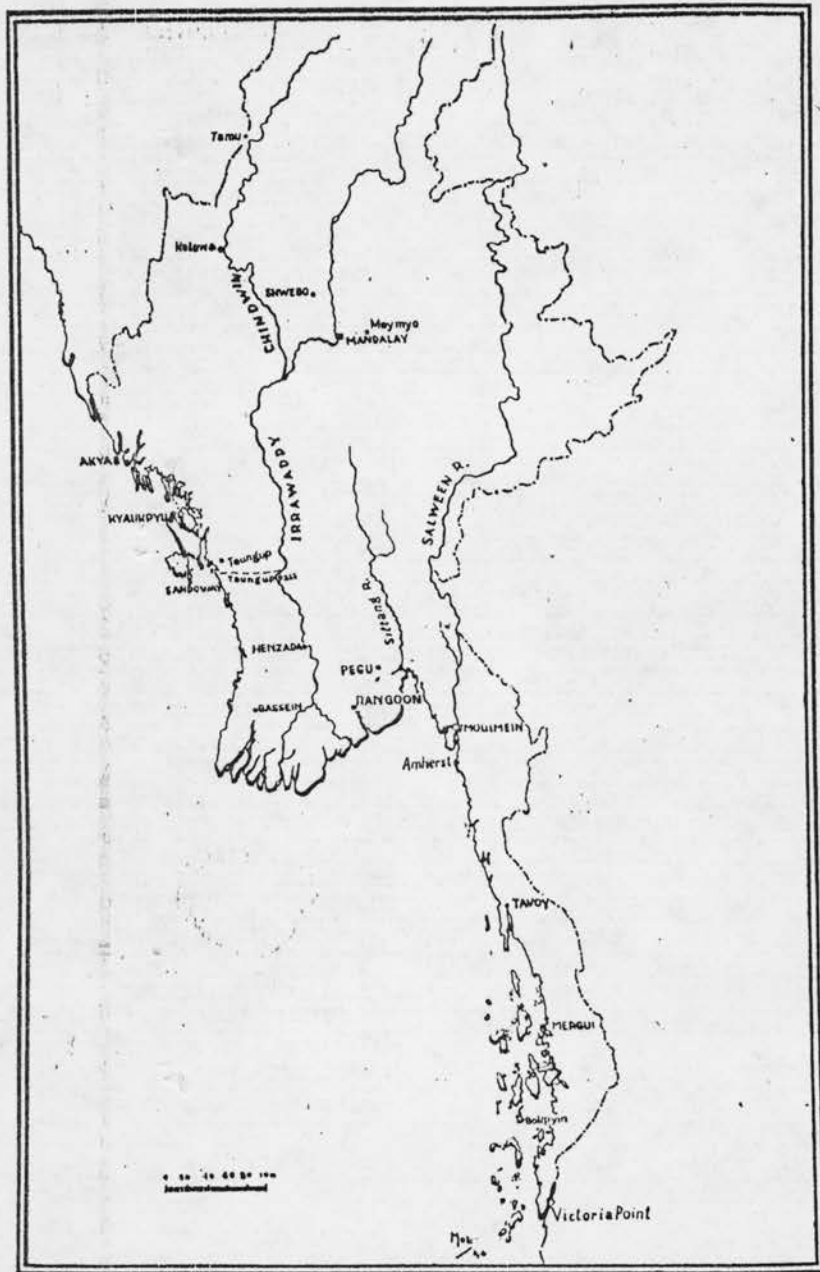
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Miles of the Eganut flotilla operating on the Arakan Coast

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The Coastline of Burma.



BURMA'S NAVY

Burma separated from India in 1937. She thereafter became responsible for her own local Naval defence.

It was decided that a Burma R.N.V.R. should be formed to implement this responsibility and so provide a local force for the Naval administration and defence of the ports and coast of Burma in time of war.

This is an account of the first years of the Burma R.N.V.R. : of how it began and of the part it has played in the war in the East. It is not a spectacular or dramatic record, but simply one of endeavour by a small number of people to make a Burma Navy, worthy of its country, and one which would make its maximum contribution towards the defeat of the enemy.

It will be seen that this Burma Navy has not been inactive. It was in action on the day that Burma was invaded by the Japanese. From Victoria Point to Akyab it operated continuously on the long coast of Burma throughout the retreat of 1942. It took part in all operations on the Arakan coast, in 1943 and 1944, and in those which resulted in the recapture of Arakan in the Spring of 1945, and the re-occupation of Rangoon.

The Burma R.N.V.R. is composed entirely of volunteers. A variety of races, religions and philosophies are represented by its members, all of whom work together with the greatest cheerfulness and enthusiasm.

Very few had even seen the sea before they joined the Burma Navy. Although Burma certainly has a fighting tradition, only the Arakanese have a sea-faring back-ground. To the majority, therefore, the sea and ships were quite strange.

The adventurous spirit and quick intelligence natural to the people of Burma soon overcame any difficulties that might have been expected from men suddenly thrust into what was virtually a new world to them.

When war was imminent Commander K. S. LYLE, Royal Navy, was sent to Burma on the recommendation of Admiral Sir James SOMERVILLE

who was then Commander-in-Chief, East Indies. He arrived in Rangoon in June 1939, commissioned to form the Burma R. N. V. R. and to be appointed Naval Officer-in-Charge, Rangoon, on the outbreak of War.

FORMATION :

Before a Navy can be formed various legal and constitutional problems have to be dealt with. If the Force is not constituted strictly according to the law its members may find themselves to be pirates when they put to sea in an armed ship.

A certain amount of delay in the formation of the Burma R.N.V.R. occurred while the legal aspects were being attended to. (It was discovered, for instance, that although the Governor of Burma was empowered to raise Military and Air Forces in Burma the fact that he might need to raise a Naval Force had been overlooked when the Government of Burma Act was drafted and he had not been given the powers to do so.)

Apart from Legal matters, questions of Pay and Allowances, numbers of each category of Officers and Ratings which would be required, conditions of service, eligibility for entry, standard of education ; all these details, and various political implications, had to be studied, discussed and decided.

Pay and Allowances had to be assimilated to those of other Empire Naval Forces and at the same time to those of other Defence Services raised or to be raised in Burma. Every measure had to be justified to satisfy the Finance Department that the Government was getting value for its money.

The aim was to obtain the highest possible standard of education for ratings and the Commanding Officer could not compromise on this question as it was clearly of vital importance to the future of the Burma R.N.V.R. This has certainly been proved since. The difficulty was that if a high standard of education was decided upon, the rates of pay would have to be in accordance with that standard and this would make the Burma R.N.V.R. a far more highly paid service than any other for which Burmans were then eligible, with the exception of the Burma Auxiliary Force, the Military Territorial organisation.

The solution of this problem was not assisted by the fact that the Army recruited mainly hill-tribesmen whose rates of pay were in accordance with the standard of education required. This was naturally somewhat lower than the standard necessary for a technical service such as the Burma Navy. Only Military Forces had up to then been raised in Burma so there were those who had to be convinced of the necessity for a higher standard of education in a Burma Navy than was required by the Army in Burma at that time.

These difficulties were finally resolved, but the "War Telegram" of September, 3rd. 1939, caught the Burma R.N.V.R. still unformed and its official formation did not take place until June 1940.

In the meantime, various local craft were being converted for use as minesweepers, anti-submarine vessels etc., Rangoon was organised as a Defended Port, the Naval Control Service was established and manned by retired Naval Officers living in Burma, the Examination Service was put into operation and conducted at first by Rangoon River Pilots and later by Officers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. Voluntary classes were started for the instruction of potential officers and engine-room ratings in order that no time should be lost while waiting for the official formation of the Force.

In accordance with the provisions of the Rangoon Port Defence Scheme, the services of the Mercantile Marine Department of the Government of Burma were placed at the disposal of the Naval Officer-in-Charge, Rangoon, Officers of this Department, who were all highly qualified professional seamen and engineers, were of the greatest value as instructors. Their knowledge and enthusiasm enabled quite a high standard of training to be reached by those undergoing the voluntary classes before the Force had even been formed. The Mercantile Marine Department also supervised and designed the conversion of the various vessels which were to be manned, when completed, by the Burma R.N.V.R.

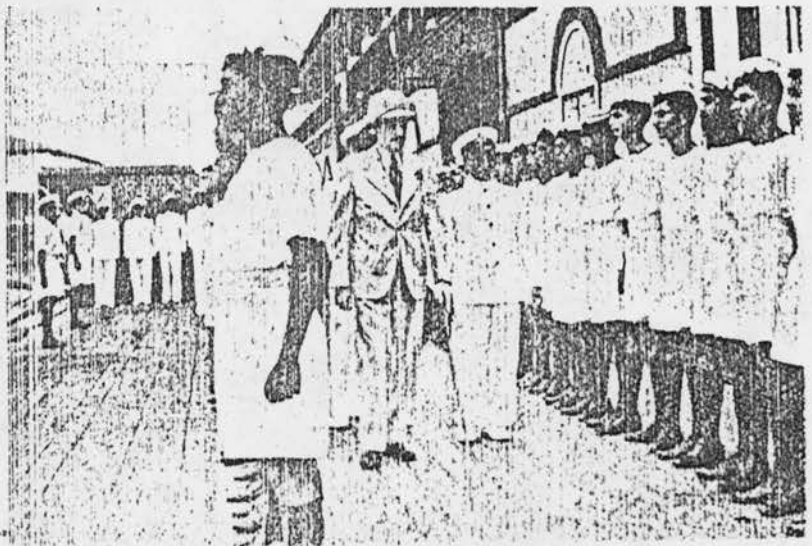
Everything was therefore ready to go ahead as soon as the Force was officially formed.



U.S. ARMY
 PHOTOGRAPHY
 WASHINGTON, D.C.
 1918

*Some of the crew of
 a Buena Vista.*

*Inspection by Sir
 Ronald Ross
 Smith accompanied
 by Lieutenant John
 Pe, the first Bosnian
 officer to be im-
 mersed in the
 British Army.*



RECRUITMENT :

When the official date for the formation of the Burma R. N. V. R. was announced, all Officers who had been attending the voluntary classes and who could be released from their civil employment, were commissioned. Sub. Lieutenant Than Pe became the first Burman Naval officer and recruiting of ratings was started.

At first the number which could be enrolled was limited by the lack of training facilities and instructors. A warrant Officer Instructor (Mr. Lavington) had been sent out by the Admiralty and three or four experienced men who had been in the Army and were now in various jobs in Rangoon—some of them were Police Sergeants—were enrolled as Petty Officers or Leading Seamen. These latter, although untrained in Naval matters, were nevertheless most useful on the parade ground and as small arms and machine-gun instructors.

Plans had been made for the construction of a shore headquarters for administration and training but, while waiting for the plans to be approved and the building erected, the Public Works Department Store Yard in Strand Road was borrowed under a friendly arrangement with Mr. Tommy CLARKE, P.W.D. This place contained the remains of a concrete tennis court and it was therefore possible for drill to be carried out even in monsoon weather. Rangoon having a rainfall of about 110 inches during the five months of the South West Monsoon, this was quite an important consideration. There were also suitable buildings for use as lecture rooms.

Hundreds of recruits were interviewed; the record was over 400 in one day. As members of all races and peoples were eligible to join if they were British Subjects living in Burma, it was a very cosmopolitan crowd that assembled on the days when interviews took place. Sturdy young Burmans and Karens, Arakanese, Anglo-Burmans, Bengalis, Madrassis, Europeans, Sino-Burmans, Gurkhas, Chinese, Talains from the Tenasserim coast and Shans and Kachins from the hills; Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, Hindus, all were represented. The variety of dress both in colour and form may be imagined, and it was truly remarkable.

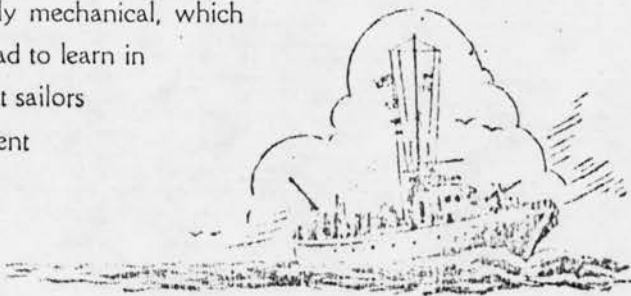
Fortunately for the Commanding Officer and the British Officers conducting the interviews, the required standard of education made knowledge of the English language compulsory.

The majority of those who were accepted were Burmans, Anglo-Burmans and Karens, but even today there are representatives of twelve different races in the Burma R. N. V. R.

Pessimists who predicted that a Burma Navy would have no popular appeal were soon proved to be wrong. The grounds on which this view was based were that, as Defence was a Reserved Subject and the Ministers had no say in matters concerning the Defence of Burma, there would be objection to the country's money being spent on the raising of a Naval Force for "Imperialistic" purposes, with which the people of Burma were not concerned. As it happened, the Burman Ministers themselves were the most enthusiastic supporters of their new Navy and it received an immediate popular response.

There were various reasons for this. As mentioned before, the Army mainly recruited hill people and Karens, so at this time opportunities given to Burmans to take part in the defence of their own country were somewhat limited. This was probably the principal reason for the popularity of the new Force; it also provided employment for well-educated young men, the pay was good and the Burma Navy, being something new, appealed to the adventurous nature of the Burman.

By nature the Burman is inclined to be rather easily bored; he likes variety and he is mechanically-minded. The variety of subjects, mostly mechanical, which these young Burmans had to learn in order to become efficient sailors suited their temperament and mental ability and they took to the work with extraordinary alacrity.



SHIPS :

Having got the men, the next thing was to get the ships.

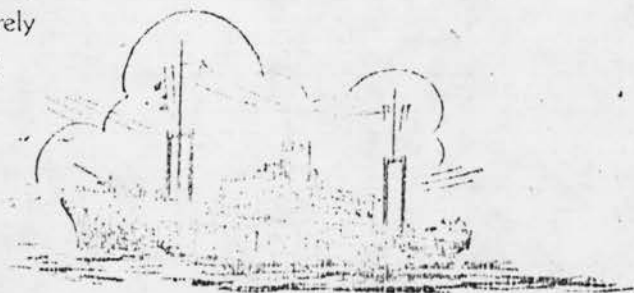
Five 75 ft. Thorneycroft Motor Launches were laid down, but as these would take some time to complete, it was necessary, not only for training but for patrol work on the coast and other local Naval defence duties, to provide ships of some sort.

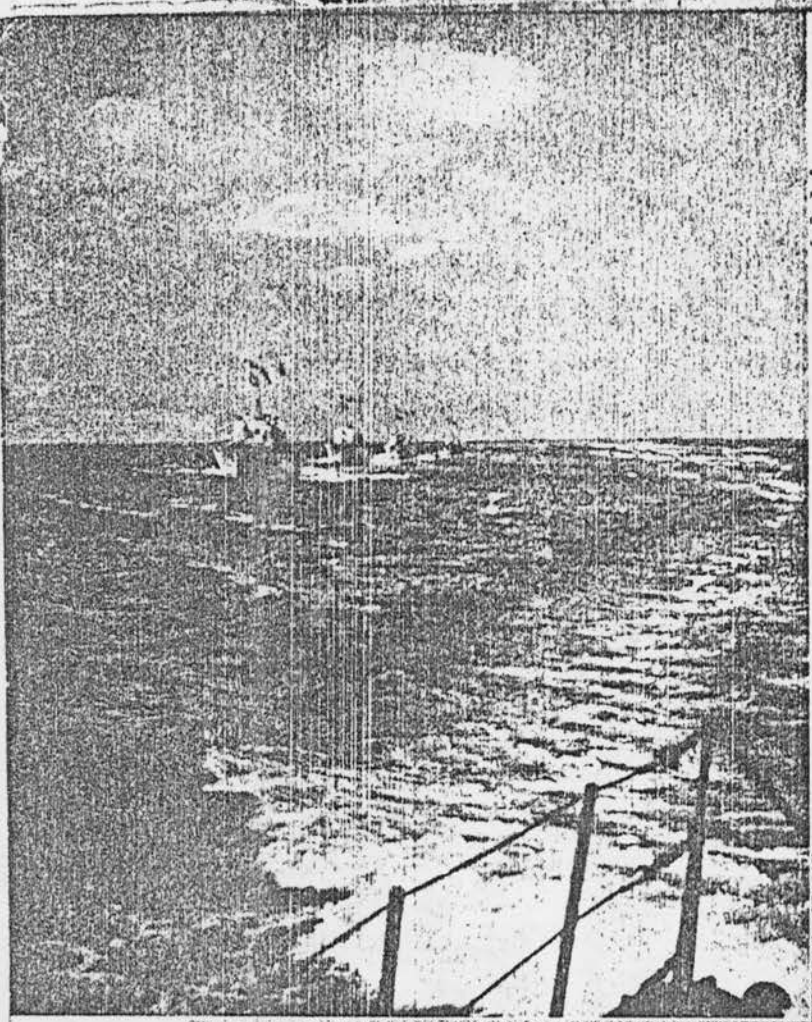
It was found that very few of the vessels which had been ear-marked before the war for conversion to minesweepers, antisubmarine ships etc., could be spared from their normal jobs and that others were unsuitable for a variety of reasons. One vessel was the only sea-going tug in the whole of Burma, another was the only steamer carrying cargo and passengers between Rangoon and Mergui and Tavoy ; others were found to be unseaworthy or otherwise defective.

An ancient dredger was used as Examination Vessel and was moored half-way down the river off Dry Tree Point where the Examination Battery manned by the Burma Auxiliary Force was situated. This dredger, having plenty of deck space, came in handy as a stationary training ship where officers and men could learn the rudiments of seamanship.

A small tug, the "SOMAGYI", which had recently been built for the Port Officer at Akyab, was requisitioned and converted for use as a minesweeper, much to the distress, needless to say, of the Akyab Port Officer (Captain Rogers) who had long been waiting for its delivery.

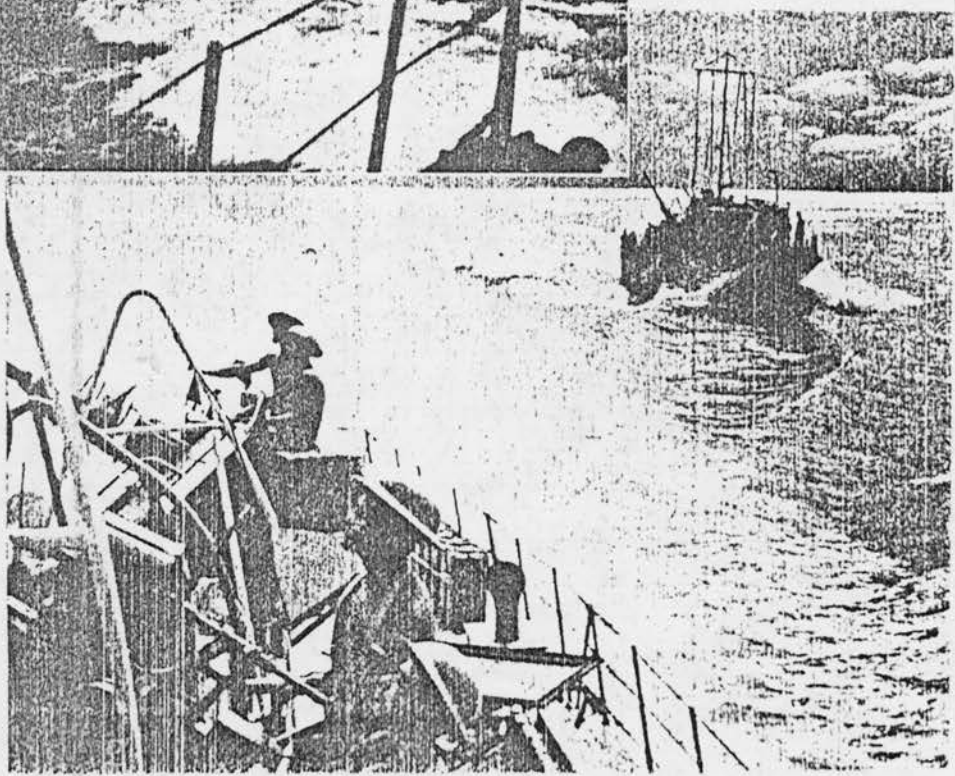
The "SOMAGYI", although designed purely as a tug, had suffered some vicissitudes during her construction. At different times while she was building, it was





REPRODUCED FROM THE OFFICIAL RECORDS OF THE U.S. NAVY, 1914-1915, PAGES 100-101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000

*Surma M.L.'s on patrol
off the Arakan Coast.*



decided that she must also be fitted and constructed for buoylifting and have accomodation for Pilots. Quite a number of other ideas had also been super-imposed on her original design. These alterations produced in the end a rather peculiar result to which was now added her conversion for minesweeping : she had an amazing amount and variety of gear and fittings, a lot of top-hamper giving a kind of house-boat effect and her stability was certainly not as it had been intended. Indeed there was considerable doubt as to whether she was stable at all. However, she was useful as a minesweeper and invaluable for anti-seasickness training on the "kill or cure" principle. The "SOMAGYI" later went through many adventures and conclusively proved her stability, of which her designer Mr. N. K. S. ADAM of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company had always been convinced. She certainly saved, and, perhaps, even enhanced, Mr. ADAM's professional reputation, but no one could say she was comfortable.

Three Government Launches, the "CURTANA", "PIRATE" and "KIMHWA" were armed and used on patrol off the Mergui Archipelago. They did some useful work, and at the same time provided an opportunity for Officers and Men to get practical seafaring experience and a knowledge of the coast and the islands.

The activities of Japanese fishing boats and pearl divers had for some time been a nuisance to the Government of Burma, not only in the Mergui Archipelago but also at Bassein and Sandoway. It was the poachers in the Mergui Archipelago that caused the greatest concern.

These Jap fishing boats had large and fast parent ships and there was nothing on the Burma coast that could catch them. Their "lawful occasions" only thinly disguised their real intention which was to survey the islands and the coast and to collect as much intelligence about this area as they could. Some of these fishing boats were captured by Lieutenant T. M. FERGUSON. It was afterwards held that this capture was illegal as Lieutenant FERGUSON had no powers of arrest, so the Government of Burma gave all Officers of the Burma R. N. V. R. the powers and authority of Customs Officers.



A Section of the Wireless Receiving Station.

The first of the Thorneycroft boats, M. L. 1104, was launched at the Government Dockyard by Her Excellency the Hon. Lady COCHRANE, on the 24th. April, 1941. After her trials, M. L. 1104 proceeded to Moulmein and thence down to Mergui under the command of Lieutenant Commander SMITH, who was also the Senior Officer of the Mergui Archipelago Patrol Flotilla. She was later followed by M. L's 1100 and 1101, when completed at the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company's Dockyard and commissioned with Lieutenants CAMPBELL and PENMAN in command.

As well as trying to keep check on Japanese fishing boats, a certain amount of harbour survey in the islands was carried out and some very useful information was obtained.

A small base with a Wireless Station was established at Mergui for Maintenance of the Flotilla and for communication with the main Naval Wireless Station which had been established by the Burma R. N. V. R. at Rangoon under the charge of Lieutenant DUNKLEY.

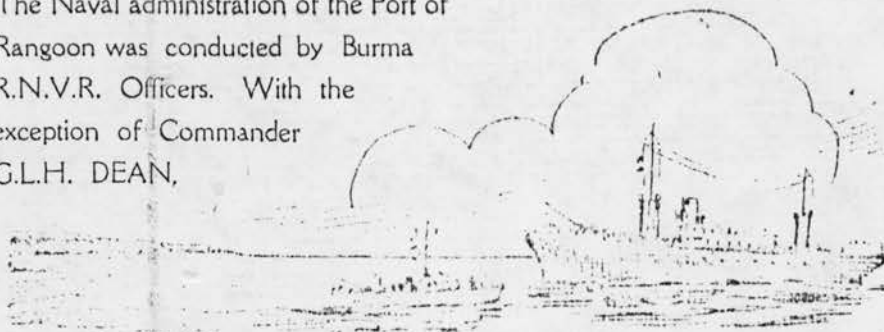
Throughout this training period, great importance had always been attached to the value of good communications, particularly wireless, and this

certainly proved its value when things started to happen. If a Force engaged on Coastal Patrol work cannot ensure the accurate and speedy transmission of reports, it has little value; and if the Wireless sets do not work or the operators are incompetent, the ships might just as well stay in harbour. With the help of Lieutenants WHITCUTT and DUNKLEY and Sub. Lieutenants PO THEIN and PORTER, all of whom had experience of wireless telegraphy before they joined, a high standard of operating and maintenance of sets had been achieved by the time war with Japan broke out.

WAR WITH JAPAN :

By the date of the outbreak of war with Japan, the Burma R.N.V.R. had made considerable progress. Training had been intensive. Officers, as a result of excellent tuition by Lieutenant Commander J. C. NEEDHAM and Lieutenant C. D. MURRAY, had become competent navigators and the majority of Officers and Men had had quite a lot of sea experience. The Mergui Archipelago and the approaches to Rangoon are no yachtsman's paradise in the South West Monsoon. As the small converted vessels and the 75 ft. M. L.'s were all that the Burma R.N.V.R. possessed, weather could not be considered. Jobs had to be done and chances taken, even if the ships were really too small to operate in all weathers. With the South West Monsoon blowing against a six-knot ebb tide in the mouth of the Rangoon river, when the waves stand up on end, skilful handling of ships is soon learnt.

By this date, then, although still lacking an adequate number of ships, the Burma R.N.V.R. had a reasonably trained and experienced company. The Naval administration of the Port of Rangoon was conducted by Burma R.N.V.R. Officers. With the exception of Commander G.L.H. DEAN,



R.N.R., who remained as Naval Control Service Officer, the Naval Officers who had been called up for the Naval Control Service were replaced by Burma R.N.V.R. Officers and released for duty with the Royal Navy, where they were urgently required. The Sea Transport Service was in charge of Commander (E) J.J. MURRAY, Burma R.N.V.R., assisted by other Burma R.N.V.R. officers. Defensive Equipment of Merchant ships and Degaussing were carried out under the orders of Lieutenant Commander (E) H. W. MUNROE-MILLAR, Burma R. N. V. R. The examination Service, Contraband Control, Naval Intelligence, Coast Watching and Signal and Wireless Stations were all run by the Burma R.N.V.R. It could be said that the force had achieved one of its objects, that of relieving the Royal Navy of responsibility for providing Officers who could ill be spared. The Naval Control Service Officer and the Naval Officer-in-charge (who was also Commanding Officer Burma R.N.V.R.) were the only Officers who were not Burma R.N.V.R.

The last two Thorneycrofts, M. L's 1102 and 1103 were about to commission (they were destined to join in the fray without having undergone any sort of trials). Two Fairmile M. L's, fourteen motor minesweepers and two "Bassett" class anti-submarine and minesweeping trawlers were under construction at the Government and Irrawaddy Flotilla Dockyards.

The shore administrative and training headquarters with accommodation for Officers and Men, which had been designed, and its construction supervised, by Lieutenant J. E. BINGHAM, was now complete and occupied. The Burma R.N.V.R. was a living organism.

This was the situation on the day of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

INVASION

After the Japanese landings in Malaya it was anticipated that an attempt would be made to invade Burma from the South. M. L's were despatched to Victoria Point and the Pakchan river to report any sign of enemy activity. This was, in fact, the spot at which the Japs first crossed into Burma. Coming down the Pakchan river, which marked the border between Burma

and Thailand, they attacked and captured the aerodrome at Victoria Point. M. L's covered the evacuation and demolition of the town and aerodrome and then established a close inshore patrol to try to keep track of the enemy's movements.

Bokpyin, further up the coast, which also had an aerodrome, was the next place attacked by the Japs. It was held by a small detachment of the Burma Frontier Force but after fierce resistance they were forced to retire. Major LOVE, their Commanding Officer, a man of great courage, was killed whilst leading a counter-attack. One M. L. was able to get up the creek at High Water and bombarded concentrations of the enemy: amongst other targets she secured a direct hit on a Japanese Officer with her 3-pounder gun.

Mergui and Tavoy were the next to go and the work of the M. L's developed into the evacuation of the troops, stores, guns and equipment, attacking the Japanese whenever they could see them, picking up survivors in small boats, and demolishing everything they could which might be useful to the enemy. All other communications, Civil and Military, having now broken down, the M. L's were the only source of information from which those in control in Rangoon could get any idea of how the situation was developing on the Tenasserim Coast. The wireless operators kept the sets going and the Senior Officer (Lieutenant Commander C. D. MURRAY) was able to get his reports through to Rangoon and so supply information of the greatest value. After the fall of Mergui this was more difficult as the wireless link provided by the Mergui Station (of which Sub. Lieutenant G. H. E. CARMICHAEL assisted by Sub. Lieutenant KIN MAUNG BO, was in charge) became inoperative.

It was evident that the Japs were making for Moulmein using the "infiltrating" methods which they had found so effective in Malaya. An attack on Burma from this direction made Moulmein the key point to Rangoon, and, with the small military forces then in the country, it was the key to the conquest of the whole of Burma, This had always been recognised, and the country South of Moulmein was only thinly held by recently-raised formations.

A Wireless Station was established on the Moulmein aerodrome and was in charge of Sub. Lieutenant PO THEIN (a Karen Officer): this took the place of the Mergui station and also assisted the R. A. F. In addition to its responsibility for Naval communications with Rangoon and the M. L.'s, this Station, at the time of the fall of Moulmein, was carrying all the R. A. F. Wireless traffic and a great deal of the Army's as well. It was uncomfortably situated as the enemy were doing their best by air attack to render the aerodrome untenable.

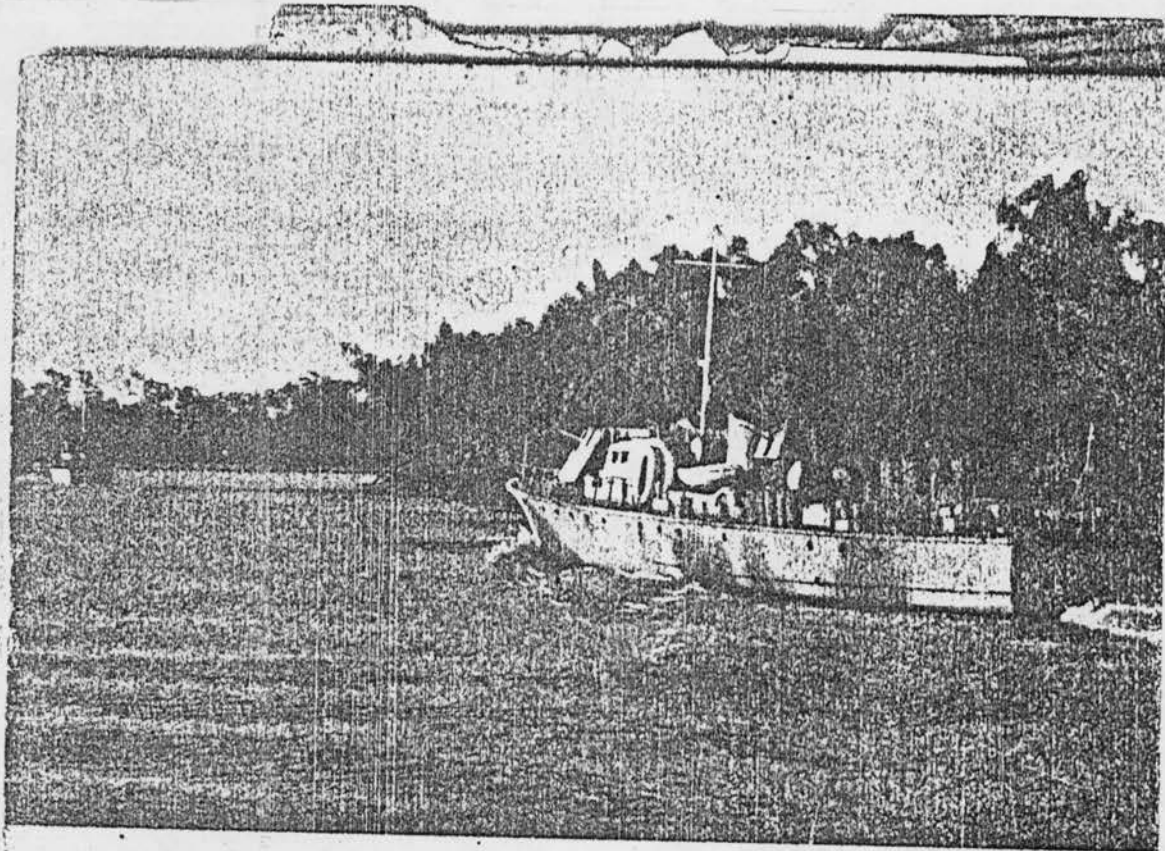
RANGOON:

By this time, things in Rangoon were not going well. The town had suffered two air-raids, the only two major raids made by the Japanese on the town itself, but their effect had been astonishing. In the first one, over 2,000 people were killed and many more seriously injured, mostly Indian coolies; in the second raid, two days later, eight people were killed by almost the same number of enemy planes dropping about the same load of bombs. The reason for this was that within 48 hours of the first air raid, this town of 400,000 inhabitants was virtually empty; most of the labour and the small traders in Rangoon were Indians and when the bombs fell they started walking to India. Certainly, Strand Road and other parts of Rangoon had suffered from the bombing and they rather naturally felt that they would be better out of it. The Japs had used anti-personnel bombs and very few of the coolies had gone into the shelters.

The exodus from the City was an amazing sight; thousands of people carrying all they possessed on their heads; beds, furniture, clothing, pots and pans and bundles of every description, thronged up the Prome Road, the only way out of the town, as thick as a crowd leaving a cup-final football match.

Although a certain amount of labour returned after a time, Rangoon





M. L's operating in an Arakan creek

was for all practical purposes without labour from then on. As no further work could be done on them and everything was at a standstill, the Fairmile M. L's and the Motor Minesweepers under construction which were sufficiently far advanced for their hulls to float were prepared to be towed to India. Finally the two Fairmiles and six Motor Minesweepers were got away and towed to Indian ports by the "MATANG", and the "SIR HARVEY ADAMSON". The remainder, with all material and equipment which could not be removed, were destroyed.

MOULMEIN.

A party of the Burma R.N.V.R. was sent to Moulmein under the command of Lieutenant LOVE to assist with the evacuation of troops and equipment across the Salween River to Martaban and also to help in the demolition of the Port, the Lighthouse and other installations. Moulmein was by this time well within range of enemy artillery but the party accomplished its task, even though some of them, including Sub. Lieutenant ROBERTSON, had to swim the Salween River; others were cut off and had to walk back to

Rangoon. Some of the latter joined up with a party of Gurkhas who had also got left behind and they finally turned up in Rangoon after an adventurous trip through the Japanese lines. On the way they had an opportunity of learning from their Ghurka friends what to do if a platoon of Japs is found asleep; they formed the opinion that, with practice, just as good results could be achieved with a "dah" (the Burman's national weapon) as with a "kukri", but readily admitted that their Gurkha colleagues were artists at the job.

Moulmein and Martaban fell and the army was driven back over the Sittang River. The fall of Rangoon was now certain as re-inforcements could not possibly arrive in time to save the hopelessly out-numbered troops who had been fighting every inch of the way and who continued to fight throughout the length of Burma until, in the end, they were forced over the mountains to Assam.

FALL OF RANGOON :

M. L's 1102 and 1103 with Lieutenants BERRY AND BINGHAM in command were now in commission. The others had returned to Rangoon and the five of them operated patrols between Rangoon and Moulmein and Amherst and in the approaches to the Rangoon and China Bakir Rivers. They were to report, and if possible, to prevent any attempt on the part of the enemy to make a landing in the Delta. It was expected that such an attempt would be made from Amherst or Moulmein, and so it was.

M. L. 1103 commanded by Lieutenant CAMPBELL, who was now Senior Officer of the Flotilla, captured a large country craft commanded by a Japanese Officer and manned by an assortment of Japanese, Siamese and others. The Japanese Officer was extremely angry when captured, as, although the boat was well armed and bristling with machine guns, his crew refused to open fire on the M. L. The boat was taken alongside the R. I. N. Sloop "HINDUSTAN" who was also on patrol off the mouth of the river, and the M. L. was given orders to tow the country craft up to Rangoon. This craft was one of six or seven which had started out from Amherst and some of the others had been spotted by M. L. 1103. The "HINDUSTAN"

somewhat optimistically took the responsibility of dealing with these others but as they quickly got into water too shallow for the "HINDUSTAN" to follow they escaped and succeeded in making a landing. This was a disappointment for the Burma M. L's who felt that with their light draught and comparatively high speed they could have bagged the lot, if they had been given the chance.

Preparations were now being made for the evacuation of Rangoon and the demolition of the Port and Oil Refineries. Depth charges were laid under the Jetties and demolition charges were placed.

The Danish ship "HEINRICH JESSEN", which had been requisitioned for the evacuation of troops from the Tenasserim Coast, now became a sort of mobile Naval Base and the Headquarters of the Burma R. N. V. R. All movable stores, provisions and ammunition were loaded into her and all Officers and Men employed ashore were accommodated on board. The "HEINRICH JESSEN" was a modern ship built at Hong Kong in 1940 for the China coast trade ; she had excellent accommodation and good stowage space. She was commanded by a Dane, Captain HANSEN, an exceptionally fine man and a first-class seaman. Except for one Indian Officer, her Officers were Danish and the crew Chinese. This ship had escaped from Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang and was now to be the last ship to leave Rangoon.

Preparations were made to dismantle the Naval Wireless Station and the equipment was divided to establish a Station in the "HEINRICH JESSEN", another in the "YENGHUA" with which Lieutenant Commander DUNKLEY was proceeding to Akyab, and one to be loaded on to the lorries as a Mobile Naval Station attached to Army Headquarters. This latter was to provide communication between the G. O. C. and the Commodore, Coast of Burma (Rear-Admiral Cosmo GRAHAM) who was in charge of Naval operations on the coast and whose Headquarters were to be at Akyab.

Arrangements were made for the evacuation of those female members of the Cypher and Secretarial staff who had not already been sent up-country, and headed by Miss Olga George, who had been Secretary to the Naval

Officer-in-charge since the beginning of the war, they took passage by sea to Calcutta.

The Chief Cypher Officer, Lieutenant HORROCKS, suffered a disappointment at this time. There was in his office an extremely noisy and mechanically troublesome coding machine which although a most useful instrument, worked with skill and great determination by Miss Agnes TATE, had become, on account of the terrible noise it made, the hated enemy of the Chief Cypher Officer. He had obtained a sledge hammer with which to destroy this thing and had been anticipating the pleasure of dealing with it accordingly. It was, however, decided that it must be saved and it was duly loaded in the "HEINRICH JESSEN". It was a sad disappointment. The Burma R. N. V. R. never saw the machine again as someone (could it have been the C. C. O.?) made certain that when it got to Calcutta it stayed there.

Parties of Burma R. N. V. R. Officers and men were now doing a variety of services. Some were with the Sea Transport Service and were working day and night discharging troops, guns, tanks, mules, etc., from the transports, with a skeleton labour force. Parties of ratings were loading valuable cargo, wolfram, lead etc., into departing ships: others were engaged in preparations for demolition. Lieutenant PENMAN was attached to the Royal Marines to assist them in forming a Flotilla composed of Government launches armed with machine guns, which were to operate on the Irrawaddy. The exploits of this Royal Marine Force "VIPER" are recorded in the Admiralty booklet: "The Royal Marines".

Lieutenant J. M. McNAUGHTON, with Lieutenants (E) SKEEN-SMITH and WRIGHT had gone to collect all the power-driven craft they could find in the Delta to prevent them falling into Japanese hands. This party was at Wakema when Rangoon fell and had to make its way to Henzada and later joined up with the Irrawaddy Flotilla staff who were organising Inland Water Transport for the Army: the party finally trekked out of Burma with the General Manager (J. MORTON) of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company.

A small base had been established at Bassein with Paymaster-Lieutenant HARRINGTON-HAWES in charge and a Wireless Station had been installed with equipment transferred from Moulmein to provide communication with Rangoon. Fuelling and Maintenance arrangements were made for M. L's and other craft on passage to Akyab.

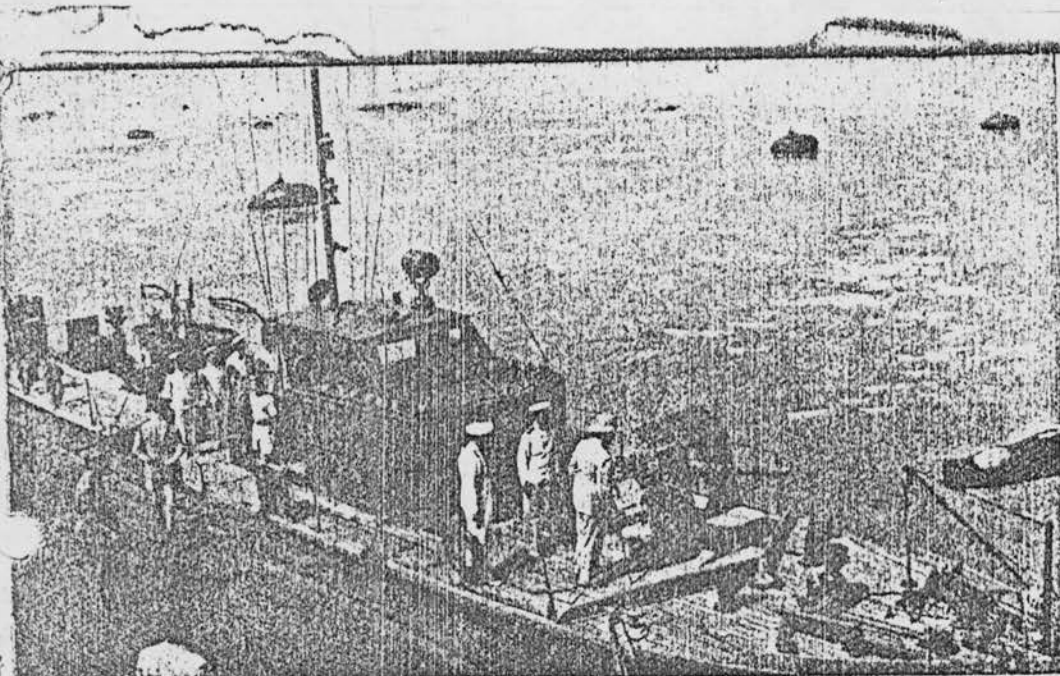
Some officers were put in command of river steamers, tugs and other craft which it was thought, could be saved, and they succeeded in getting quite a number round to Akyab.

DEMOLITION AND DEPARTURE :

The day arrived when it was clear that Rangoon must be evacuated: the enemy were at Pegu and were marching on Mingaladon, 12 miles to the North of Rangoon, and some were in the Delta approaching Dalla. This was a sad day for everyone; the flag of the Governor, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith had been hauled down at Government House and the signal was made for the demolition organisation to be put into force. The harbour was cleared except for launches standing by to take off the demolition parties and when the "HEINRICH JESSEN", the last to leave the Jetties, was ready to go, the line of wharves was silent and deserted, the only figures to be seen being those of the Chairman of the Port Commissioners (J. STRONG) and the Assistant Conservator of the Port (N. MORRISON) who had come to 'let go' the "HEINRICH JESSEN'S" wires.

The ship proceeded down the river to Dry Tree Point where she was to wait for the demolition parties to come aboard after completing their work and to embark the Officers and men of the Dry Tree Point garrison, after they had destroyed the Examination Battery.

On this day also the Burma R.N.V.R's Mobile wireless Station left in company with Lieut, Colonel BELL's Army Signals Party who were with the "last ditchers" from Army Headquarters under General HUTTON, then Chief of Staff to General ALEXANDER. The wireless gear had been loaded into Motor Transport and the Party set out with 4 trucks and 4 cars under the command of Lieutenant Commander B. WHITCUTT, with Sub. Lieutenants



Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith inspects an M. L. of the Burma K. N. V. R.

PO THEIN, FRANCIS, E. SET and BARTELS, Chief Petty Officer CREE (one of the ex-Police Sergeants) and about 16 men, Telegraphists and Radio Mechanics, and a few Engine-Room ratings to keep the vehicles going.

Twenty-three miles out of Rangoon it was found that the Japs were across the road and had established a road-block. About two thousand of the enemy marching west from Pegu were encircling Rangoon to enter the city by Insein. The Army Headquarters Staff, including General ALEXANDER himself and Generals HUTTON and GODDARD, and miles of motor transport were now held up and in serious danger of being captured. Bitter fighting went on all through the night and principally by the efforts of the 7th. Armoured Brigade and the 1st. Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, the road block was cleared and the situation put in order by the next day.

The Wireless Party had many adventures and did valuable work in keeping communications going between Army Headquarters and Akyab; first, while Headquarters were at Maymyo and later at Shwebo. They were even able to keep contact with M. L.'s on patrol off the Arakan coast. They



CONFIDENTIAL

After bombing prior to an amphibious assault in Arakan.

made themselves useful in many ways, and, having good men to keep the vehicles in running order, were well-off for motor transport and thus able to assist the less fortunate units. Stoker OSBORN on one occasion drove General "Joe" STILWELL from Ye-U back to his Headquarters with the 5th. Chinese Army, a distance of 70 miles. By the time Shwegyin was reached, the Army were on their way out. Equipment and vehicles were destroyed by the Chindwin River, the party was ferried to Kalewa and marched out by Kalemyo, Tamu and Palel to Imphal and in due course fetched up at Calcutta where all but two immediately went down with malaria.

On this trip Lieutenant PO THEIN, whose proud boast is that he was "The only Karen Naval Officer in the World", added yet another distinction

to his reputation. It is believed that he is the only Officer to have marched out of Burma without his trousers. Having the typical muscular thighs of the Karen his skin became badly rubbed by his shorts ; so caring little for modesty by then, he wisely took them off.

The Rangoon Jetties, Oil Refineries and Storage Tanks were blown up on the afternoon of March 7th. 1942, but it was well into the night and early morning before all those engaged in the destruction of the port were embarked.

The Deputy Conservator of the Port (Captain H. C. G. BROWN), whose task was to touch off the charges, experienced an unpleasant surprise. A ship which had been lying alongside had decided to put ashore a cargo of land-mines which she was carrying and under the prevailing circumstances no doubt felt more comfortable without them. Without anyone being informed, these were put into one of the sheds close to the spot where the Deputy Conservator had arranged to press the push and when he did press it, a closer and bigger bang occurred than had been allowed for. Captain BROWN however, was quick enough to get under a Jeep before the bits came down but burnt his backside on the exhaust pipe. Probably, the general sense of humour was by this time a little warped but the story caused a lot of amusement in an otherwise dismal atmosphere. BROWN, in fact, was seriously injured and was laid up for more than a year afterwards, but he now laughs about it himself.

When all were at last on board, the "HEINRICH JESSEN" weighed and went to sea leaving astern that once beautiful and happy city which within a few weeks had become a scene of desolation and misery. A pall of thick black smoke from the burning oil tanks now hung over it, blotting out the sky.

AKYAB :

After a short stay in Calcutta while Military personnel were disembarked and cargo and salvaged stores from Rangoon were discharged, the "HEINRICH JESSEN" proceeded to Akyab. There she acted as a Parent

SECRET

BASE ENGINEERS

OFFICE

ship for the M. L's., spare hands were accommodated on board, stores and ammunition issued from her and the wireless station in charge of Sub. Lieutenant PORTER, was responsible for communication with ships on patrol and with the outside world.

The Commodore, Coast of Burma, had set up his operational headquarters ashore with a number of Burma R.N.V.R. Officers on his Staff, and a Naval administrative and Maintenance organisation was established with Burma R.N.V.R. Officers in charge of the different departments.

The five Thornycroft M. L's with Lieutenant A. CAMPBELL as Senior Officer of the Flotilla, and the R.I.N. Local Defence Vessels "HAIDERI" "SELAMA", "SANDOWAY" and "ST. ANTHONY" carried out patrols down the coast to give warning of the approach of any hostile ships and H. M. I. Ships "INDUS" and "SUTLEJ" were operating on extended patrol.

The main problem to be dealt with at this stage was the evacuation and control of Indian Refugees who were pouring into Akyab. Thousands of those who had fled from Rangoon after the first air-raid had now reached the coast, crossing the Arakan Yoma by the mountain track over the Taungup Pass. It will never be known how many died on the journey but it was said that you could find your way by following the line of corpses. They were robbed and murdered by dacoits; many died of cholera, others of starvation and exhaustion. They were dying every day at Taungup, Kyaukpyu and Akyab.

Akyab is the only Port on the Arakan Coast and was therefore the destination of all these unfortunate refugees. Ships were sent from Calcutta to take them to India.

Only a skeleton Civil administration was functioning under the Deputy Commissioner, OO KYAW KHINE, I.C.S., who did magnificent work in a gallant attempt to keep some semblance of law and order in the District and he succeeded in doing so at Akyab. The outlying districts, however, soon got out of hand and internecine warfare broke out between the Mohammedans and the Arakanese. OO KYAW KHINE was ambushed and killed while returning in his launch from Buthidaung, presumably at the

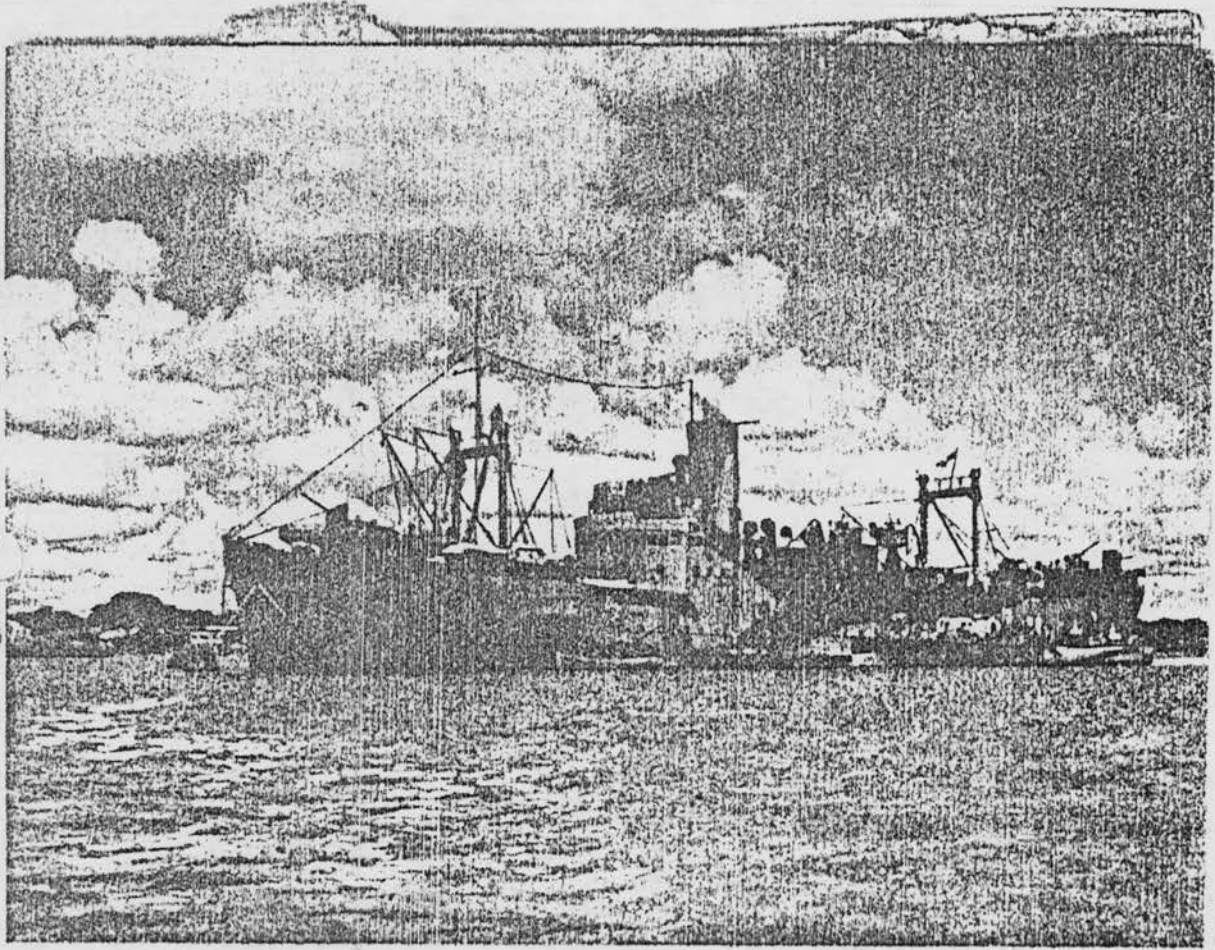
instance of his Mohammedan enemies. He was an Arakanese member of the Indian Civil Service and certainly upheld the great traditions of that Service: he was a brave man and an efficient administrator.

Sub. Lieutenant H. C. G. BROWN was put ashore from his M. L. to take charge of the Civil Administration at Kyaukpyu on Ramree Island. With the assistance of three men of the Cameronians and some Gurkhas who had been cut off from their units and made their way to the coast, he succeeded in restoring order out of chaos, organised the feeding and housing of more than 20,000 refugees and controlled their embarkation in the ships sent down from Akyab.

In addition to the patrols carried out by the M. L's on the coast and in the creeks and rivers, a variety of tasks fell to the Burma R. N. V. R. at Akyab. The water and electricity supply was kept going, notably by Lieutenant Commanders (E) MUNROE-MILLAR and DIXON. Sea Transport organisation and the embarkation of refugees was in the hands of Lieutenant Commander C. D. MURRAY and Lieutenant SIMS, Lieutenant Commander MURRAY also acting as Pilot for the Merchant ships entering and leaving the Port. Commander NEEDHAM and Lieutenant Commander MUNROE-MILLAR successfully took charge of the salvage of H.M.I.S. "ST. ANTHONY" after she had run on the rocks and was badly holed.

The enemy having air-supremacy at this time, Akyab and the ships in the harbour were subjected to constant attacks by Japanese aircraft. In the first big air-raid the Burma R.N.V.R. lost a fine officer and experienced seaman in Lieutenant Commander A.E. HUGHES and in a subsequent raid H.M.I.S. "INDUS" was sunk by bombing, fortunately without a casualty. The Japs would send their fighter escort down to "shoot-up" the ships and small craft in the harbour while the Bombers carried out their attack, but remarkably little damage was done by these attacks and H.M.I.S. "SELAMA" was the only ship to be seriously hit. Though frequently the target for enemy bombers, neither the "HEINRICH JESSEN" nor the M. L's suffered any damage.

The Japs gradually closed-in on Akyab by moving through thick jungle



*U. S. BARRACUDA (left) and S.S. HEINRICH JESSENY back again
at Aden, 1915.*

in small parties and the M.L.'s were sent up the creeks to find out where the enemy had got to and to do their best to slow up their advance. Sometimes they took troops on board and landed them up the creeks to patrol in search of the enemy. This was unpleasant work as these creeks were in places too narrow in which to manoeuvre. The banks were lined by thick jungle which gave complete cover for enemy mortar and machine-gun posts which could open fire on any craft using the creeks, and remain unseen. M.L. 1102 with Lieutenant BERRY in command was caught in this way while carrying a platoon of Rajputs. Sub. Lieutenant WRIGHT was killed and Lieutenant (E)

DESANGES wounded by machine-gun fire from a post hidden in the jungle. The M.L. though full of holes, suffered no serious damage.

It was finally decided that Akyab could no longer be held. There was only one Indian Infantry Battalion to defend the place and the enemy were now approaching in strength.

Guns, equipment and troops were embarked in the "HEINRICH JESSEN" and H.M.I.S. "HAIDERI". Small craft were collected together and those which were incapable of being sailed to Chittagong were destroyed. Demolition charges were fired under the Jetties and anything which might be useful to the Japs was demolished. The day all this was going on, attacks by enemy aircraft were almost continuous but by great good luck none of the ships was hit.

The small ships and various river and harbour craft sailed with the Burma M.L.'s during the night of May 3rd. 1942, for Chittagong and the "HEINRICH JESSEN" with the Commodore and Staff on board proceeded to Calcutta.

In his official report on these operations the Commodore, Coast-of Burma, remarking on the personnel of the Burma R.N.V.R. reported that after months of operating under adverse weather conditions, frequently subjected to air attack and latterly from machine-gun and mortar fire from the shore, their morale was unimpaired at the end, and that he was glad to have been associated with them.

INDIA:

When the Burma R.N.V.R. arrived in India in May, 1942, it seemed a possibility that a Japanese invasion of India might be attempted and preparations were being made to resist such an invasion.

The M. L.'s of the Burma R.N.V.R. were ordered to operate patrols in the Sunderbunds, the area of numberless creeks and rivers in the Delta of the River Ganges. Their function was to report any indication of the enemy "infiltrating" through this Delta area. An administrative and training base

was established at Calcutta with a wireless station for communication with the M. L's on patrol.

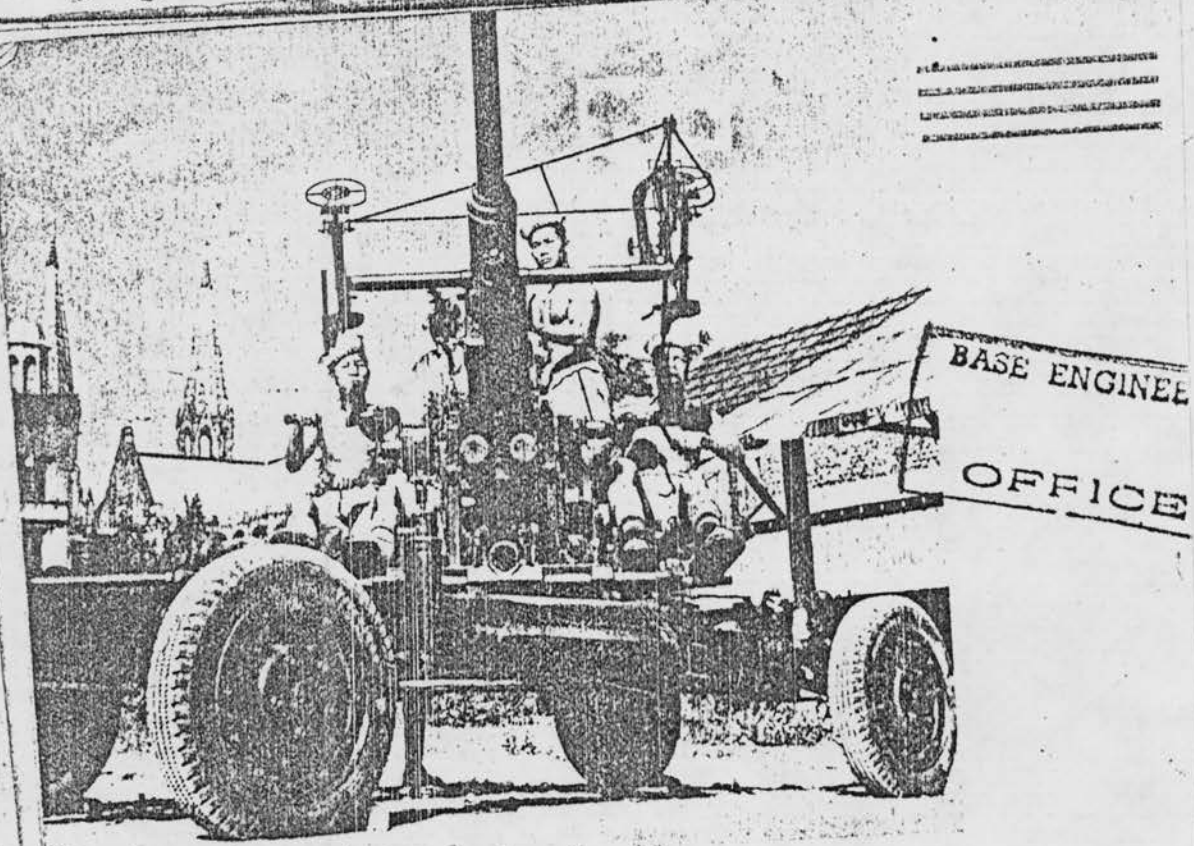
A good deal of re-organisation was now necessary. Except for a small reserve, and the telegraphists for the shore wireless station, only the number of men required to man and maintain the ships which had got away from Burma were now with the Force. All the British Officers and the majority of Burman and Anglo-Burman Officers, other than those who were under training at the time and were left behind on the evacuation of Rangoon, were still serving. There were therefore too many British Officers in proportion to the number of men: the more senior and experienced of these were lent to the Royal Indian Navy and some were permitted to transfer permanently to that service. The Commanding Officer hoped that a time might come when more ships could be obtained and accordingly recruiting was opened to young refugees from Burma and preliminary training was started at the Calcutta Base.

The Burma R. N. V. R. was placed under the operational orders of Vice-Admiral Sir. HERBERT FITZHERBERT, commanding the Royal Indian Navy, but retained its own identity and its own administration under the Government of Burma.

OPERATIONS ON THE ARAKAN COAST :

After the Monsoon of 1942, the Army began planning a counter-attack to drive the Japs back from the line on which they had established themselves in Arakan. The M. L's were withdrawn from the Sunderbunds, refitted and overhauled, and sent off to act in support of the Army on the Arakan Coast, where they were joined by a Flotilla of M. L's of the Royal Indian Navy. The Burma R. N. V. R. undertook responsibility for the Naval wireless organisation for the operation and stations were established at Chittagong and at Teknaff on the Naaf river for communication with Burma R.N.V.R. Headquarters at Calcutta and with ships operating on the Arakan Coast. The duty of the small Coastal Force was to be of as much "nuisance value" as possible to the enemy on the coast and to keep them occupied there.

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF ENGINEERS
WASHINGTON, D. C.



Cadets under training at the Naval Barracks



It was also their job to prevent enemy supply craft from using the rivers and creeks which provided the principal means of transport in Arakan.

Maungdaw on the Naaf river, the middle of which marks the border between India and Burma, was recaptured and then Buthidaung at the head of the Mayu river. The Army had, therefore, established two bases from which to advance down the Mayu Peninsula and this, the first British offensive against the Japs, was so far successful.

Although the enemy still held one bank of the Naaf, they were now denied the use of the river. They were still, however, free to use the Mayu river by which to supply their forward troops from their main base at Akyab. Much has been written—and learnt—about jungle warfare. Whatever other conclusions may have been arrived at, there is no doubt that at this time the supply problem was of paramount importance and difficulty in the Arakan Jungle, both for the enemy and for ourselves. The side which had the best supply line had an immense advantage and it was essential that every effort should be made to hamper the enemy's waterborne lines of communication.

As our troops advanced, their supply difficulties increased, but for the enemy, whose supply lines were shortened, this was reversed. It was decided, therefore, that two Burma M. L's should make an attempt to force the entrance of the Mayu River, although it was narrow and both sides held by the enemy.

M. L. 1100 (Lieutenant Commander CAMPBELL) and M. L. 1101 (Lieutenant COLE) made the passage at night, negotiating the numerous sandbanks with no accurate charts. They passed safely through, within a hundred yards of enemy positions, and reached Buthidaung without incident.

For four months these boats operated at night behind the Japanese lines, attacking everything they could find moving on the river. They lay up during the day, camouflaged with leaves and branches and where possible, under overhanging trees. Royal Air Force of 224 Group kept the river clear of enemy craft during the daylight hours. Later on, M. L's 1100 and 1101 were joined by some Landing Craft from the Royal Navy. These craft were much



more suitable for this kind of work than the M. L's, being less easily seen and better armed, and it did not matter if they ran aground: their crews simply jumped over the side and easily shoved them off again. They did some magnificent work under very trying conditions.

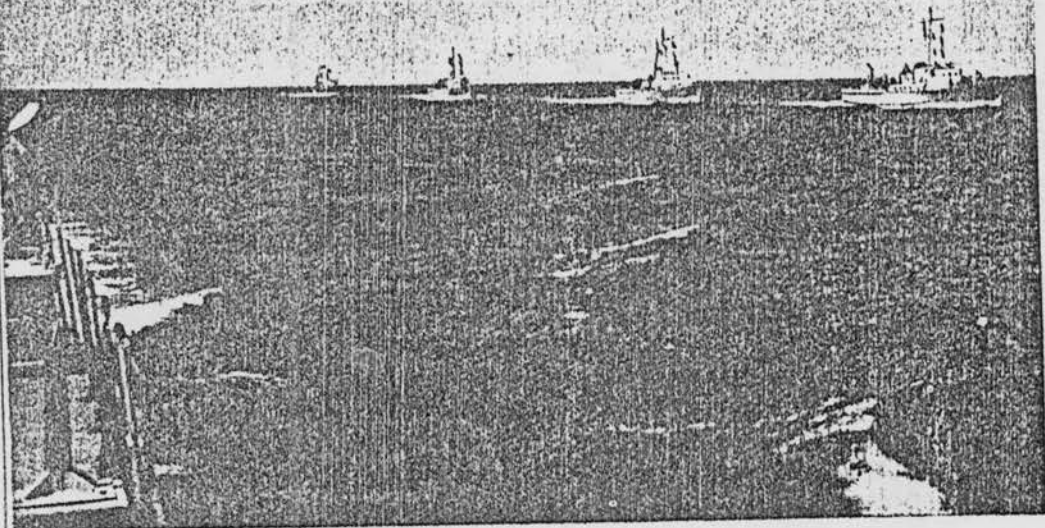
The counter-offensive failed. The Japs advanced again and re-captured their former positions. As they advanced, the enemy placed guns and mortars in positions where they could effectively deny the passage of the Mayu River to any of our craft. The two M. L's were, therefore, hemmed in. Until the fall of Buthidaung, they could still make themselves useful and even when the town was abandoned, they were of great assistance to the Army in evacuating troops, guns and stores. Having had considerable experience of this sort of work since the Japs first invaded Burma and captured Victoria Point, they were by now quite expert at it.

M. L's 1100 and 1101 got up to Taurg Bazar which remained in our hands. The boats were now in poor condition. They had been shot up by aircraft, their engines had been consistently over-run and there were no facilities for adequate maintenance or repairs. Officers and men were deeply disappointed at the failure to recapture at least part of their country and the majority were suffering from malaria or dysentery or both.

The Monsoon had broken and supplies had to be carried on foot or by mules over the mountain range which runs down between the Naaf and Mayu Rivers and it became clear that the M. L's would be quite unserviceable by the end of the Monsoon. It was, therefore, decided that they should be demolished and replaced by two of the Fairmile M. L's building for the Royal Indian Navy. As these were larger and better ships, they made up for the disappointment of having to destroy the old ones.

All movable guns and stores had to be carried over the mountain pass, up and down river beds which were roaring torrents. Lieutenant KIN MAUNG BO, who was in charge of the work, could sometimes obtain mules from the Army but even they had difficulty in keeping on their feet. Torrential tropical rain was practically continuous.

The other M. L's after operating on the coast with Royal Indian Navy



M.L.'s of the Burma Navy on Patrol off the coast of Arakan.

Coastal Forces returned to Calcutta for refit and repairs which were badly needed.

CHANGE OF BASE :

Owing to the high incidence of malaria and the impossibility of doing any deep-sea training from Calcutta during the Monsoon, a base in Southern India was chosen and the Headquarters of the Burma R.N.V.R. were moved to Mandapam in August, 1943.

This was a healthy place where training could be carried out all the year round. Officers and men gradually regained their health in readiness for the next attempt to recapture the Arakan Coast after the Monsoon season of 1943. The remaining three M. L.'s were condemned as unseaworthy and were transferred to the R.I.N. for harbour duties and more Fairmiles were allotted to the Burma R.N.V.R. from those building in India.

While these new boats were still under construction, a number of Officers and Men were attached to Combined Operations to man a Flotilla of Landing Craft for the next post-monsoon assault on the Arakan Coast.

The second offensive in Arakan also failed, the only gain being the capture of Maungdaw. This, however, gave us the free use of the Naaf River as a base from which Coastal Forces could operate. The Burma R.N.V.R. was transferred to the operational control of the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet (Admiral Sir James SOMERVILLE), and on the completion of the Fairmiles which were under construction, they would have a full Flotilla operating as an integral part of the Eastern Fleet's Coastal Forces. In the meantime, the two Fairmiles (M. L's 436 and 437) which were towed to India from Rangoon had been commissioned and the landing craft crews were withdrawn to man the new M.L's 391, 414, 415 and 418.

The Base at Mandapam having been established, it was possible to carry out intensive training with the new boats during the Monsoon of 1944. The working and maintenance of new types of guns, engines and wireless sets had to be learnt and Officers and men had to become accustomed to the new M. L's.

During this working-up period, some of the M.L's went to Ceylon, where they were attached to big ships of the Eastern Fleet. This was the first time that the Burma R.N.V.R. had been with the Fleet and it was a most valuable experience. The men got on very well with the ratings of the Royal Navy and Officers and Men were able to get first-hand experience of how the Royal Navy worked.

LIBERATION OF ARAKAN :

At last, in January, 1945, a successful assault was made on the Arakan coast. Akyab, Ramree and Cheduba Islands were re-captured. The M. L. Flotilla formed part of the Arakan Coastal Forces and operated in conjunction with Royal Naval, South African and Indian Flotillas under the command of Commander R. R. W. ASHBY, D. S. C., R. N. V. R., to whom

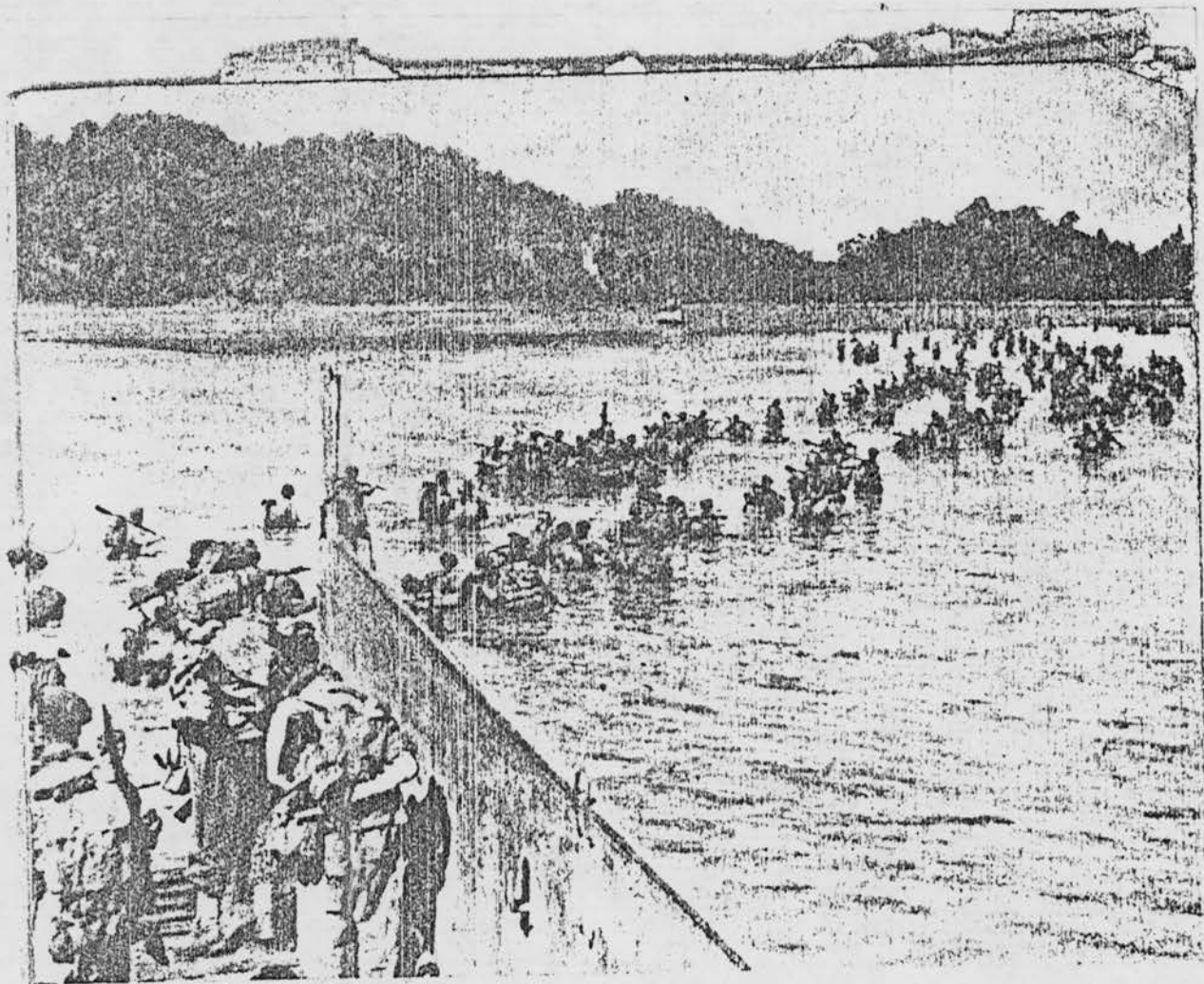
the local knowledge and previous experience of the Burma R. N. V. R. were most valuable.

The Flotilla was still commanded by Lieutenant Commander CAMPBELL, D. S. C., who now had the satisfaction of leading the Burma M. L. Flotilla back into Akyab, nearly three years after he had been obliged to lead it out. All the Officers were thoroughly familiar with this coast and had experience of the peculiar problems of "Creek Warfare" in Arakan. With the other Flotillas of the Arakan Coastal Forces, they took part in the landings, in the attacks on Japanese Supply Vessels and in night operations in the creeks and rivers to prevent the retreating enemy from reaching the mainland.

Before the actual landings took place on the Arakan Coast a lot of preliminary work had to be done and from October 1944 onwards the M. L's were kept busy on a variety of jobs. They carried parties down the coasts to reconnoitre the beaches, intercepted Japanese Supply Craft in the Creeks and Rivers, and, by bombarding enemy positions on the coast, were of considerable 'nuisance value.' One of the objects was to keep the maximum number of enemy troops occupied on the sea flank of 15th. Indian Corps. All these operations were carried out at night by the Arakan Coastal Forces Flotillas.

One pleasant feature at this time was the friendship struck up between the South African and the Burma Flotillas.

After the re-capture of Akyab on January 3rd 1945, the M. L's were engaged in operations designed to discover, by drawing their fire, whether the Japs were attempting to bring in reinforcements and to obtain domination of the inland water supply routes. Successful attacks were made and enemy supply craft destroyed notably in the Myebon River and Dainbon Chaung. The enemy craft being more heavily armed and armoured than the M. L's, the experience and training of the Burma R. N. V. R. in this sort of warfare stood them in good stead. As the boat that got the first shot in was usually the one to win the battle, the Burma M. L's invariably opened fire before the enemy, who, on some occasions, were blown up before they had time to fire a shot.



Liberation of Burma—Landing in Arakan.

The M. L.'s took part in the landings at Kyaukpyu and Cheduba Island, after which they were engaged in intercepting the Japanese, who were now attempting to escape to the mainland from Ramree Island. They succeeded in destroying a number of craft, carrying what remained of enemy troops on the island.

These operations were, of course, all carried out at night, and after nearly five months of this sort of work, the crews needed rest and the M. L.'s repairs. They had been in Creeks not normally considered to be navigable, had been on and off mud-banks and hit by enemy gun-fire. The M. L.'s



Loading craft making an assault on Arakan—1945

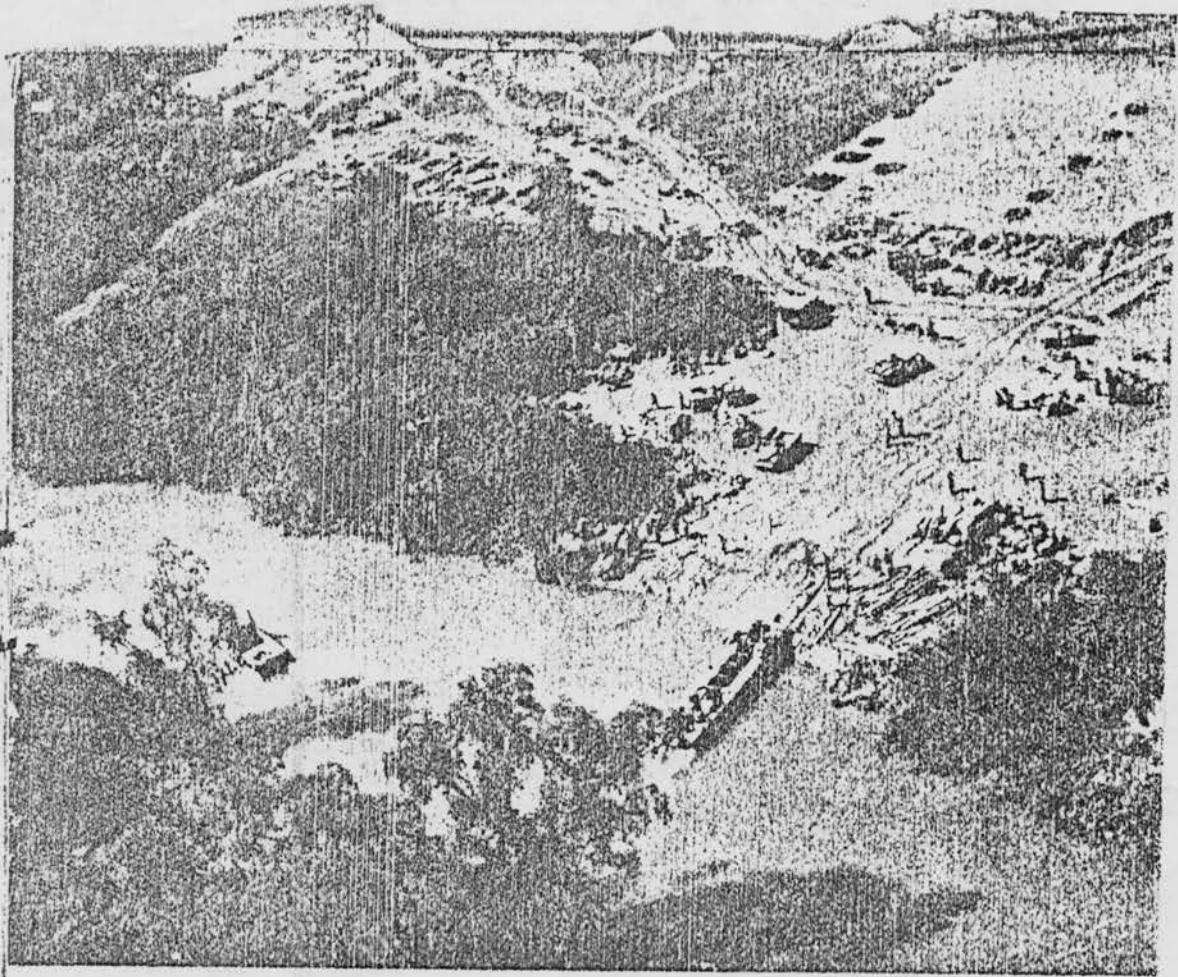
were therefore withdrawn to India for refit in preparation for the assault on Rangoon.

RETURN TO RANGOON:

The name "Rangoon" is the English corruption of the Burmese "Yangon" which means "The End of Strife". So it was for the Burma R.N.V.R.

Owing to the magnificent and rapid advance of the Fourteenth Army, the re-occupation of Rangoon was unopposed.

The advanced Headquarters Staff with the Commanding Officer,

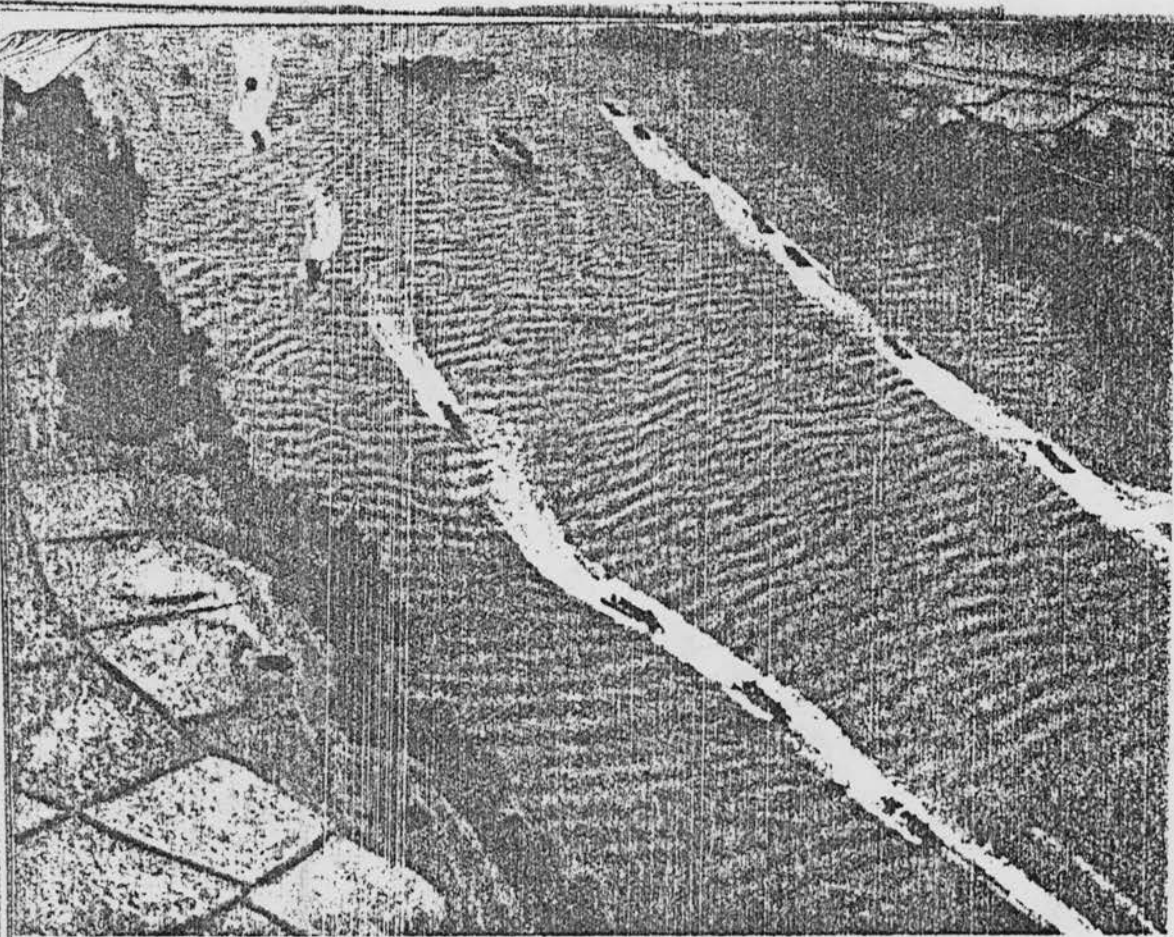


Loading in Arakan - 1945

Burma R.N.V.R., which had sailed in s.s. "SONTAY" from Madras, met the M. L's on May 10th, 1945, at the mouth of the Rangoon River, where they had arrived from the Arakan Coast. The M. L's were in charge of our old friend "HEINRICH JESSEN", now H.M.I.S. "BARRACUDA" and Depot Ship of Eastern Fleet Coastal Forces. With a Flotilla of nine Fairmile M. L's, the Burma R.N.V.R. were home again.

RE-ORGANISATION :

Strife was not entirely ended. Mopping-up operations in the Delta area between Rangoon and Bassein continued to be carried out by the Coastal



M.I.'s and landing craft in Arakan.

Forces to prevent the Japanese from escaping to the sea and detached bodies of the enemy from joining up together. Several successful actions took place during these hunting operations which were interspersed with parties of welcome from the people of the Delta villages. Some of these villages were the homes of men of the Burma R. N. V. R. and it was certainly a "happy return" after three years.

It was now the duty of the Burma R. N. V. R. to expand the Force in order to release Royal Naval personnel for service elsewhere. Recruiting and intensive training were started. Signalmen and Wireless Operators, Diesel Engine Drivers for Harbour Craft, Engine Room Ratings for maintenance of



A non-circ. at action stations.

M. L's were produced to take over the duties performed by men of the Royal Navy.

In a few months the Burma R. N. V. R. increased its number to exactly five times that which it had on its return to Rangoon.

Many promotions were made from the lower deck, and men who had been Petty Officers a short time before found themselves with Commissions and in command of M. L.'s. They were well qualified for such promotion and they could now be regarded as specialists in the particular job for which they were required.

Another Fairmile M. L. Flotilla was taken over by the Burma R. N. V. R. and thirteen H. D. M. L.'s previously manned by the Royal Navy. This made the Burma R. N. V. R. a total of thirty ships. The child that left Burma in May, 1942 seemed to be growing up!

In October, 1945, the commanding Officer of the Burma R. N. V. R. was once again appointed Naval Officer-in-Charge, Rangoon and by December 1st. the Royal Navy had been withdrawn and the Burma R. N. V. R. assumed all Naval responsibilities on the coast of Burma.