

Burma from 1925 to 1938

After the collapse of the British Empire in the mid 20's, Burma was thrown into a decade of chaos. Any 'national' government during the period had little recognition within Burma, and any recognition gained was nominal at best, with no government able to exercise any real control outside of whichever city they chose as their capital. Indeed, between 1929 and 1930, no national government existed, even in name. Local warlords, criminal bosses, landowners, and former army commanders all exercised local control.

In response to this, a broad nationalist movement arose in the early 30's, bringing together monarchists, liberals, socialists, and anyone else who cared to involve themselves. By 1935, they had united most of the country. A series of successful military campaigns had defeated the most powerful local strongmen. Their rapid defeat convinced most of the remaining local power-holders that it would be wiser to accommodate themselves with the new order than oppose it. The Constitution of 1935 laid out the basis for a constitutional monarchy, and elections were soon held. The Socialist Party emerged as the second largest party, but were consistently frustrated by a coalition of monarchists and liberals, thwarting most of their efforts.

The Australasian Confederation watched these developments cautiously. The unification of Burma was a German-backed affair, as the German government hoped that by bringing some measure of stability to the area, they may be able to exploit the resources of the country, and cultivate a market for German goods. Also of concern was the prominent role of the socialists from the early days of the movement. After neighbouring Bengal had fallen to socialism, the Australasian government was keen to stymie the growth of socialism in the rest of Asia.

The two years following the constitution of Burma were a mixed affair. The 'Black Monday' crash of the Berlin stock exchange saw German interest, and investments, in Burma fade away. Burma was only marginally integrated into the global economy at the time, though, so the effect was more to slow growth rather than reverse it. The national government did manage to undertake a successful program to repair the damaged rail network, and constructed some (limited) new lines.

The Royal Burmese Army was also very active during this period. It was constantly, in one area or another, engaged in combat with various local forces yet to submit to the new government, or separatist forces seeking to assert their own autonomy or independence. A particularly brutal fight against the Shan raged for most of 1937, before a de-facto ceasefire took hold, with the Shan forces being confined to their southern areas.

During this time, the Socialist Party continued to build its strength. Though it did not secure the most votes, and only held a fifth of the seats in Parliament, it was the only party with any sort of membership base. All other parties courted the votes of the poor majority of the population, but their membership was almost exclusively the educated, or otherwise 'respectable' class of people. The Socialist party had, in comparison, a great many members. Despite this, it continued to find itself unable to achieve much when faced with the parliamentary coalition of the other parties.

On December 18th, 1937, the Socialist Party launched a coup, and rapidly secured control. A large portion of the Army's leadership, as well as its rank and file, were actually members of the Socialist Party, and the coup was virtually unopposed. Many leading political figures fled to Germany, but the Royal Family instead hedged their bets with Australasia, and its Entente allies.

The Socialist Party wasted no time implementing its reform program. Much of this involved simply legitimising many land seizures by the country's farmers. The creation of 'Red Guard' militias was also begun in many areas with a great deal of support for the party.

The Australasian Response

Australasia had, prior to the coup, begun formulating a doctrine of rapid military response to socialist activity in Asia. As well as a growing political willingness, the military was readied for future interventions

(including the formation of new units, such as two 'Naval Infantry Divisions' to spearhead any actions). Within a week of the arrival of the Burmese royal family in Australia, the government had decided (in secret) to invade Burma and topple the socialist government.

This signified something of a break from the past, as their allies (notably Canada) were asked to assist in the operation after the decision had been made, not consulted on it beforehand. Still, despite a minor grumble from Canada (de-facto leader of the Entente), all nations involved agreed to contribute forces to the operation, even if only symbolic.

The Invasion was scheduled for the beginning of February, and would primarily be an Australasian operation. Naval forces, including carrier aircraft, were to assist with the landing, to be made by naval infantry, while regular army troops would follow up and proceed inland to finish off any resistance. It was expected that two infantry divisions would be sufficient to garrison the country after the invasion, and assist in rebuilding the Royal Burmese Army to take over from them.

Australasian Forces

All branches of the Australasian Military will take part, the Royal Army, Air Force, and Navy. Overall command of the operation was given to the Burma Corps, formed for the invasion. Navy forces were to assist them with the landing and initial invasion, and would be withdrawn when no longer needed. Air Force units would be deployed to the country as airfields were secured, and were expected to remain longer than their naval counterparts.

Royal Australasian Navy

Expecting virtually no naval opposition, the naval forces were primarily present to assist with the initial landings. Most of the RAN's ships are outdated, but will be more than sufficient for this operation.

- Battleship Force

A force consisting of two battleships, three light cruisers, and six destroyers. Their guns should be used to assist in the initial landings.

- Aircraft Carriers

Two aircraft carriers, each assisted by two light cruisers and four destroyers. Their fighters will be sufficient to control the skies against the meagre Burmese airforces, but their swordfish bombers will be of minimal use against land forces.

- Destroyer Flotillas

These two flotillas are intended to be stationed permanently in Burma, but can also be used for coastal bombardment when possible.

Royal Australasian Airforce

The Airforce is currently stretched very thin, having been overcommitted to the defence of Australia & New Zealand, a permanent force in what remains of British India, and now Burma. The virtual lack of Burmese opposition in the air means that air superiority will still be easy to attain. A fair number of light and heavy bombers have also been assigned, and will prove useful against an enemy with a near total lack of air defences.

- 1st, 6th, 17th Fighter Squadrons

With 18 aircraft each, even a single one of these would be enough to defeat the Burmese airforce. These fighters will therefore be most useful in supporting ground forces, though they will be quite limited in this role. The 1st Squadron is equipped with the newest aircraft, while the 6th & 17th still use older models (though still comparable to their Burmese counterparts).

- 3rd, 4th, & 7th Bombers Squadrons

These heavy bomber squadrons have 8 aircraft each. Their range, when combined with a lack of enemy defences, should make them a useful tool for the Australasian forces. The 7th Squadron is

equipped with newer bombers than the 3rd & 4th.

-2nd, 3rd, & 5th Attack Squadron

These squadrons each consist of a dozen new twin-engine light bombers. Their range is comparable to the older model heavy bombers, but they are likely to be of more use against enemy troops.

-Base Forces

The RAAF has allocated defences and support personnel for up to six small bases, to be deployed as you see fit.

Royal Australasian Army

The Army has recently undergone an expansion, and is now considerably larger and of higher quality than it was just a decade ago. It is, however, hard pressed for manpower. The small population of Australasia, and the competitively huge size of the navy, means that the army has little leeway. Four divisions have been assigned to the operation, though it is planned for only the two infantry divisions to remain after the invasion. The Australasians are superior to their enemies in size and firepower, but should still exercise caution: a determined defence by the Burmese away from the coasts (and at the end of a long Australasian supply line) may provide some difficulty, and the Australasians are keen to avoid high casualties.

-Corps Units

-Burma Corps HQ

The Corps Headquarters. It is planned for the HQ to set up in Rangoon. Mandalay has also been suggested for its central location, but this option has less support.

-Corps Artillery

A battery of 8 heavy guns, to dislodge any stubborn defenders out of the range of the battleships.

-Military Police Companies x3

Three independent companies of Military Police, formed for the operation. To be used to garrison important headquarters areas or as you see fit.

-Bridging Units x2

Heavy bridging equipment brought along to help traverse the many rivers of Burma.

-Long Range Reconnaissance Companies x2

These companies, recently formed, are well trained, and contain many veterans of the recent South African civil war. They are trained in amphibious and airborne operations. An early special-forces unit, they can be used for a variety of operations.

-1st Tank Battalion

Two companies of 12 light tanks and two reconnaissance vehicles. Though these tanks are a decade old at this point, they should still prove useful in this theatre.

-Labour Units

Local labourers paid, or more often conscripted, by Australasian forces for various tasks (primarily repairing railroads).

-1st Naval Infantry Division

-Division HQ

-Division Artillery

A battery of 8 25pndr guns, motorised.

-Naval Engineer Battalion

A battalion of engineers, attached permanently to this division. They are expected to undertake non-combat engineering duties as well as assisting in assaulting fortified enemy positions.

-Naval Infantry Regiments x2

-Regimental Artillery

A battery of 8 18pndr guns, motorised.

-Infantry Battalions x3

Each battalion consists of four companies, with their own machine guns, mortars, and recon capabilities. These troops are equipped with new submachine guns which

have not yet been delivered to the rest of the army.

-2nd Mounted Rifle Division

-Division HQ

-Division Artillery

A battery of 8 25pndr guns, motorised.

-3rd Armoured Car Company

A Company of 12 armoured cars

-Mounted Rifle Regiments x2

-Regimental Artillery

A battery of 8 18pndr guns, motorised.

-Infantry Battalions x3

Each battalion consists of four companies, with their own machine guns, mortars, and recon capabilities. These troops rarely fight mounted, but nonetheless have a full complement of horses for mobility. While not motorised troops, they are faster than regular infantry.

-1st New Zealand Infantry Division

-Division HQ

-Division Artillery

A battery of 8 25pndr guns, motorised.

-3rd Engineer Battalion

A battalion of engineers, capable of non-combat and combat duties.

-5th Armoured Car Company

A Company of 12 armoured cars

-Infantry Regiments x3

-Regimental Artillery

A battery of 8 18pndr guns, motorised.

-Infantry Battalions x3

Each battalion consists of four companies, with their own machine guns and mortars.

-3rd Infantry Division

-Division HQ

-Division Artillery

A battery of 8 25pndr guns, motorised.

-4th Engineer Battalion

A battalion of engineers, capable of non-combat and combat duties.

-Recon Company

A Company of motorcycle-equipped recon troops.

-Infantry Regiments x3

-Regimental Artillery

A battery of 8 18pndr guns, motorised.

-Infantry Battalions x3

Each battalion consists of four companies, with their own machine guns and mortars.

Entente Forces

Australasia's Entente allies have not made significant contributions to this operation; the Australasians believe they will be capable of independently pulling off the operation, and are eager to prove it. Allied troops are not unwelcome, though, as the opportunity to present a united front, share experience, and build the bonds between allies are all good opportunities. All forces have been placed under Australasian command, to be used as they see fit.

-Canadian Company

The Canadians, somewhat annoyed at not being consulted, but still eager to participate, have sent a company of infantry. It is much the same as any Australasian company, though the Canadians have ensured that each squad is issued with a machine gun, giving the company a decent boost to its firepower.

-Indian Company

A company of troops from British India (often referred to simply as 'Delhi'). Their army is sorely lacking in experience and equipment. To this end, they hope to gain valuable experience from the conflict. Delhi also has a particular interest in this conflict, as they sit next to the large socialist state of the 'Bharatiya Commune' based out of Bengal. The victory of socialism in Burma would be a serious blow to the future of Delhi. These troops are more or less on-par with a standard Australasian company.

-French Company

A company from the Nationalist French exiles who rule much of North and West Africa. These troops represent the best of National France's forces, and are well equipped, trained, and experienced. They are capable of airborne operations, and the French are eager to put these new tactics into practice, seeing Burma as an excellent testing ground.

-Caribbean Company

A company of Engineers from the Caribbean Federations. Capable of both combat and non-combat duties, the Caribbeans hope this will give valuable experience to their fledgling army.

-Portuguese Company

A company of military police transferred from Mozambique. The Portuguese have only cemented more formal ties to the Entente, and as such they are eager to contribute forces, even if largely symbolic. Though not expected to take part in serious combat, these men are experienced in security duties in Africa, and may be useful post-invasion.

-South African Squadron

Having just emerged from a civil war, South Africa is an exhausted nation. Instead of sending a contingent of land troops from its battered army, they have opted to send a squadron of light bombers. These aircraft may prove to be of more use than a company of troops would, though. They have been placed under RAAF command and may be used however you see fit.

Royal Shan Army

The Royal Shan Army is a unified force, created in the wake of the Burmese state's successful 1937 campaign against the Shan. The Shan are lightly armed, completely lacking any heavy equipment and facing serious shortages of small arms. The Shan have at least unified their forces into one structure, and have reorganised their forces into twelve companies.

-Royal Shan Army HQ

-Infantry Companies x12

These troops are poorly armed, and lack artillery support, making them far from ideal in defeating an entrenched enemy. They are made up of experienced fighters, though, and when massed for an attack or defending their lands, they are not to be ignored.

Royal Burmese Army

The Royal Burmese Army was reformed by a cadre of loyalist officers who fled after the coup, under Australasian auspices. Staffed by fiercely anti-socialist officers, its mission is almost entirely one of internal security. Its regular troops are limited in number and equipment, but are capable when paired with Australasian support.

-Royal Burmese Army HQ

-Military Police Companies x4

These companies are usually stationed in the largest cities, though they often accompany regular troops out on operations. Though trained soldiers, they are intended less for active combat and more for political policing, rooting out local support for the enemy. They gained a reputation for the terror they caused wherever they were stationed.

-Home Guard Companies x30

These companies, which numbered 30 at their peak, are made up of local troops and lead by

an army officer. They are generally half the size of a regular company, and are lightly armed. Despite this, they were quite successful: these troops are defending their own homes, and are not deployed in any other situation. These static troops denied the socialists access to many towns, kept supply lines clear, and freed up regular troops for other tasks. That said, they are still easily overwhelmed when confronted with even moderately sized attacks, and should thus be well supported.

-Infantry Battalions x3

These battalions each consist of four infantry companies. These troops are organised along Australasian lines, but lack the equipment of their allies. Independently, they are of limited use on the offensive, but supporting an Australasian operation, or leading one with Australasian support, they are capable troops. Additionally, when defending they can certainly hold their own against the socialist guerillas.

Socialist Forces

The Burmese People's Army fully committed to a conventional defence of Burma. It was only after its defeat that a strategy of guerilla warfare began to be implemented. Thus, the regular and guerilla troops did not fight side-by-side, but rather the latter evolved out of the former. The two will both be described here.

REGULAR TROOPS

Burmese People's Army

The Burmese People's Army is a more or less direct continuation of the army which united the country, and was the Royal Army prior to the coup. With all unfriendly officers either purged or having fled, the army is a politically reliable force. In addition, years of fighting have made it a competent force by international standards. While a shortage of heavy equipment is undeniable, the average soldier is adequately equipped, at least. The army is unlikely to have much success holding the enemy off near the coast - their best hope lies in delaying the enemy and holding them off further inland.

-People's Army HQ

-Tank Company

A small company of 6 Weltkrieg-era A7V tanks, purchased from German surplus.

-Presidential Guard

A 50 man force formed to protect the president. It is well trained and armed, but should not be relied upon for any other duties.

-Artillery Regiments x2

-1st Battery

The first battery of the artillery regiments consists of 6 100mm German field guns.

-2nd & 3rd Battery

The remaining two batteries each consist of six smaller 75mm guns.

-Army Brigades x3

-Mortar Company

Each Brigade has only a single company of 8 mortars, to be deployed where needed.

-Infantry Battalion x4

Each Brigade has four battalions, each with four companies. The first three companies are regular infantry, each with only a single machine gun available to them. The fourth company of each battalion is a small 'Security Company', intended more for policing duties and political suppression than combat.

Burmese People's Army Air Forces

The air wing of the BPA is tiny, consisting of only 10 aircraft, but has seen its fair share of action since its formation in 1934. The opponents of the central government lacked any aircraft of their own or any real anti-air weapons, so the Burmese were free to use their limited number of planes for both recon and attack purposes. Plans have repeatedly been presented for the expansion of the force, but a lack of funds has prevented any growth.

-BPAAF HQ

The HQ, and only active airfield of the BPAAF is at Insein, just north of Rangoon. Only four dual machine guns, converted for air defence, are available to defend the airfield. The BPAAF has skeleton crews maintaining a number of airfields across the country for planes to redeploy to, but all planes are based at Insein.

-Fighter Squadron

Consists of 8 German bi-planes, of fairly recent design. Though they are acceptable aircraft with decent pilots, they have little hope against their more numerous enemy. If not used against enemy aircraft, they may also be used for reconnaissance, or as light bombers (though their capability in this role is very limited).

-Bomber Squadron

In reality, this 'squadron' consists of only two German bombers. These aircraft proved somewhat useful in the internal conflicts in Burma, but are far too limited and vulnerable to be of much use now.

Burmese People's Coastal Defence Forces

This branch of the army, roughly approximating to the navy, is also very limited in its capabilities. Some German equipment and training gave the initial impetus to this force, but it lacks the resources to much more than a minor obstacle to an invading force.

-Destroyer

A single ex-British destroyer left in Rangoon harbour. With German assistance it was restored to working order, and a crew trained to operate it. It stands alone, however, and is unlikely to pose much of a threat.

-Coastal Batteries

These batteries protect Rangoon and Moulmein (the Rangoon battery sits some distance South, guarding the approach). Each battery has a single German ex-naval 200mm gun and a pair of older British guns left over from colonial days. They are not particularly powerful batteries, and are not protected by any concrete structures, but they at least need to be dealt with before any invader can proceed. They are particularly vulnerable to an attack from land, with only a single platoon guarding each.

Red Guard Militias

The 'Red Guard Companies' are a paramilitary force that have just recently been created. These volunteers were expected primarily to augment the regular troops and take over secondary roles to free up front line units. They technically are not part of the military, and were probably created more for security and political duties, but they will be placed under military command if need be.

-Red Guard Companies x16

These troops are armed with a wide array of excess weapons, and are rarely equipped with anything more than a rifle. They have undergone basic weapons training, but nothing more, and should not be relied upon to fight alone. They are entirely composed of committed party members, though, and may prove useful in supporting roles.

GUERRILLA TROOPS

People's Liberation Army

The largest armed force formed after the Australasian invasion, the PLA is primarily led by party members from Rangoon, and is most powerful in the South of the country. The PLA has more contact with the outside world than its counterparts in the FSM, though only the Bengalis have managed to provide any serious aid to their movement.

-Regular Companies x28

These companies are poorly armed, and are mostly made up of volunteers or conscripts without military experience. They have little hope of defeating an enemy toe-to-toe in open battle, but when massed for a surprise attack, they may be able to inflict damage on isolated enemy units. These units should be used for hit-and-run operations, fleeing before the enemy can bring their superior firepower to bear on them.

-Shock Companies x4

These companies are largely made up of ex-soldiers from the regular army, or experienced fighters transferred from other units. The PLA concentrates all its available machineguns and mortars in these units, and ensures they are well supplied with all other equipment. These companies are the strongest available to the PLA, and should be reserved for major operations where assaulting enemy positions is necessary. Losses to these units may be very difficult to replace.

Freedom Socialist Movement - Armed Wing

The FSM was originally a caucus of party members based in Mandalay who were displeased with the Rangoon-dominated leadership, as well as some policy decisions. Soon after the invasion, and defeat of the army, the FSM took the opportunity to form its own armed units, though they still claim to be party members, and deny that they have formed a new party. The FSM is smaller than the PLA, and based in the north of the country, but is otherwise fairly similar in its structure.

-Armed Columns x18

The FSM 'Armed Columns' are company-sized units, comparably to the PLA regular companies. They should be used carefully, as attempting to fight a conventional war with them is likely to end in disaster.

-Heavy Armed Columns x2

Similar to the PLA 'Shock Companies', the 19th & 20th columns are designated 'heavy', meaning that the best weapons available are concentrated in these units. They should be reserved for targeted strikes against enemy positions.

Bharatiya Support

The socialist 'Bharatiya Commune', based primarily in neighbouring Bengal, is eager to support their potential allies in Burma, but they are limited in what they can realistically provide. Food, limited amounts of ammunition and weapons, as well as some volunteers cross the border into Burma. The level of support is not huge, but may prove vital to the hard-pressed Burmese guerrillas.

-Volunteer Companies x4

These troops, primarily composed of volunteers from the Bharatiya Army, are more powerful than any units the Burmese have access to. They may prove themselves essential for any major attacks against the Australasians, but the Indians are keen to ensure these troops are not captured, which would be a serious embarrassment for them.

'HISTORICAL' OUTCOME (And suggested strategy, I guess)

When the Australasian fleet sailed for Burma, the Burmese Army was placed on alert as a precaution. They were still caught somewhat by surprise, though, as they believed the Australasians would simply perform a show of force, or put a blockade in place, before negotiations might take place. The Australasian LRR Companies were dropped into Burma first, and disabled the coastal batteries guarding Rangoon and Moulmein. This was followed by strikes by carrier aircraft which sunk the Burmese destroyer and crippled the air force at Insein.

Naval Infantry soon landed at Rangoon, Martaban, Moulmein, and Tavoy. The guns of the Australasian fleet made short work of the defenders, and the Naval Infantry quickly secured all the ports. The Naval Infantry

division had soon taken control of the entire southern coast, as Burmese troops either retreated inland, or literally ran for the hills. At the same time, Shan forces surrounded and attacked Taunggyi, wiping out the Burmese defenders there. A relief effort made some headway pushing towards the city from the north and west, but it was soon clear that the city had fallen, and the Burmese troops fell back, followed close behind by Shan troops.

The Mounted Rifles soon finished unloading and preparing at Rangoon, and took over the central thrust towards Mandalay, with the Naval Infantry shifting their focus to the West. Red guard troops attempted to delay the invading troops on the road north as regular troops fell back and prepared their defences around the city. The red guards had no hope of holding back the Mounted Rifles, and they were all quickly scattered into the hills and forests, if not destroyed totally. As Burmese troops were pulled back to face the invasion, Shan forces continued to advance and take back land they had lost in the previous year.

Burmese troops assembled their most formidable defence in the area around Mandalay, with a large number of regular troops, red guards, and all available artillery concentrated in the area. An initial Australasian attack was pushed back with heavy casualties. The Australasians, who had hitherto simply brushed aside any enemies they encountered, were caught off-guard by the sudden stiff defence. They quickly adjusted, however, and moved began preparing their forces for a major assault.

By this time, the RAAF had established several bases in Burma, while artillery and engineering units were prepared to break the enemy line. The Burmese fought hard, but superior Australasian firepower, air support, and an airborne landing behind their lines by Australasian and French troops, all combined to break their defences. Some troops fled to the north or east, while many others simply fled into the countryside, abandoning their units. The President, who had fled to Mandalay, managed to flee once more further north, but was intercepted by LRR troops and killed.

The Australasians pushed on. In the far north, some troops of the 3rd Brigade, and a few remnants from the south attempted a last-ditch stand, but they were soon defeated, and conventional armed resistance to the invasion ceased. The Australasians declared victory, and the Royal Family returned to Burma. The Naval Infantry Division was, at this point, already being withdrawn; most of the fleet had left, and the mounted rifles began to transfer control to the 3rd Infantry and move south to return home.

The defeated socialists were not idle during this time, though. A large number of soldiers and red guards had gone into hiding in the hills, forests, or simply in areas outside of the cities and towns where the enemy was based. They began to organise these troops into armed units, and political officers worked to build up anger among the peasantry and urban workers, who were now unlikely to see many popular reforms and programs come to fruition. The Australasians were lulled into a false sense of security, as no armed attacks were made against them for over two months after the success of the invasion. They were totally unaware of the movement building in the country, as their troops largely sat in the cities and larger towns, seeing little need to venture out.

The illusion was shattered in dramatic fashion when an Australasian company was totally destroyed by a surprise attack by PLA guerrillas, followed soon after by a series of attacks by both the PLA and FSM. Other than that initial victory, though, the guerrillas had little success. They attempted to launch conventional attacks against enemy positions and secure territory for themselves. They were usually thrown back by superior firepower, and when they did force an enemy retreat, the Australasians soon returned with more support and inflicted heavy casualties.

The guerillas returned to their bases and licked their wounds. After a short period of recuperation, they shifted to a more asymmetrical strategy of hit and run tactics on isolated enemies in the countryside, combined with bombings and assassinations in the cities. The Australasians began to struggle with this new threat. A series of large operations, designed to inflict damage on enemy troops, ended in disappointment. The enemy simply avoided battle, where possible, and took the opportunity to make gains in other areas. Australasian troops found themselves unable to bring their enemy to battle of their own terms, but also without the large number of troops required to garrison much of the country.

In response to this problem, training of the Royal Burmese Army was accelerated, and the 'Home Guard'

companies were created. After a year of this strategy, the Australasians began to see some results. The guerillas found it increasingly difficult to utilise the resources of towns which were now garrisoned by local troops. The presence of these local troops also freed up Australasian troops to respond with heavy force whenever the guerillas appeared. The guerillas, rumoured to have Indian troops supporting them, did manage to secure some morale-boosting victories, but there was a definite downward trend in their fortunes by now.

Eventually, the Australasians felt confident withdrawing the 1st New Zealand Division at the beginning of 1942, as Burmese troops took over most of the everyday duties of the war, generally relying on the Australasians for large operations against the Guerillas. The war would carry on for another 45 years before the remaining forces of the PLA and FSM agreed to lay down their arms.