

MILITARY AND POLITICAL PLANS FOR THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC AREA  
FORMULATED BY THE JAPANESE PRIOR TO 14 AUGUST 1945

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MILITARY AND POLITICAL PLANS FOR THE SOUTHERN PACIFIC AREA

FORMULATED BY THE JAPANESE PRIOR TO 14 AUGUST 1945

In this report the Southern Pacific Area will be considered under two topics; the Burma, Thailand, Indo-China; and the Malaya, Netherland East Indies sectors.

(I) BURMA, THAILAND, INDO-CHINA

In April 1945, before the fall of Rangoon 153,000 troops were stationed in Burma. At that time these forces composed nine divisions, subordinated to three armies, the 15th, 28th, and 33rd.<sup>1</sup> By August '45, MIS estimated that only 54,000 of that force remained in Burma.<sup>2</sup> The fifteenth army had moved to Thailand, the 2nd and 55th Divisions to Indo-China, and the 28th army (which probably commanded all the estimated 8,000 Japanese troops in the hills near Pegu) became considerably battered attempting a break eastward across the Sittang River towards Thailand.

The diplomatic staff and the Burmese National Representative Ba Maw have retreated from Burma. Ba Maw and his group have arrived in Indo-China

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1. "Order of Battle Bulletin Japanese Ground Force" #57, 7 April 1945.
  2. "Order of Battle Bulletin Japanese Ground Force" #73, 28 July 1945.
  3. FES, 21 July 1945; FES, 14 July 1945; FES, 18 July 1945; FES, 9 August 1945.



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after a wearisome trip from Rangoon via Moulmein and Bangkok. Japanese Ambassador Ishii has remained in contact with developments in Burma and has forwarded to Tokyo (through Bangkok) messages on conditions within Burma. His latest message of 4 August states that enemy spies have been parachuted throughout the Moulmein area and that Burmese agents in various important cities received orders from these spies and carried on espionage and "all sorts of disruptive activities behind the scenes." He also stated that the average Burmese is becoming more and more anti-Japanese and that "bands of robbers were stalking the countryside in broad daylight." It was quite clear that Ambassador Ishii considered conditions in Burma very unsatisfactory for the Japanese even before the Emperor had issued the order to surrender.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the fall of Rangoon, Subhas Chandra Bose, the head of the Indian Provisional Government, has also served in Burma; but when the British entered that city he too fled to Bangkok. Until mid-July he remained in command of the 18,000 members of the Indian National Army stationed in Malaya. Then the Japanese found that it became "imperative to either dissolve the Indian National Army or to curtail its operations, because of the supply problems and the danger of revolt." So on 27 July the Vice Minister of War ordered the Indian National Army disbanded (except for two or three hundred men to serve as protection for Bose) — "after

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4. 10 July 1945, #378, E-195948, 27 July 1945, E-199603, 4 August 1945, E-200418.

first making Bose understand the situation". The commander of the Southern Army was to decide the details of re-locating Bose either in Malaya or French Indo-China. Although the Indian Provisional Government was to continue, "Bose was not to go to Tokyo or China, even temporarily, but was to cast his lot with the fate of his army and his government."<sup>5</sup>

After the defeat in Burma, the Japanese began to prepare for the expected invasion of Thailand. In early April 17,000 troops served in that area.<sup>6</sup> By 28 July '45, that total had been increased to 55,000.<sup>7</sup> The 15th army from Burma had joined the 39th army in Thailand and the combined forces formed the 18th area army. The 15th army was designated to defend Northwest Thailand which had previously been defended by the none too trustworthy Siamese Army.<sup>8</sup> During the first few weeks in August the 18th army was to see their first action in Thailand. They were to "attack and destroy" allied secret airfields which were being built near Sakon Nakon (near Indo-China border). Scouting planes had described these bases as "secret airfields at which four-engine planes can land".<sup>9</sup>

Although the standing army of Thailand has numbered 200,000, the Japanese have placed little trust in either the Siamese army or people.

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5. 19 July 1945, G-20, K-197658; FES, 2 August 1945.
  6. "Order of Battle Bulletin Japanese Ground Forces" #57, 7 April 1945.
  7. "Order of Battle Bulletin Japanese Ground Forces" #73, 28 July 1945.
  8. FES, 21 July 1945; FES, 18 July 1945.
  9. FES, 24 July 1945.



Recent incidents have furthered this opinion. Allied agents have been parachuted into Siam and the people have joined them in secret meetings. In July one of the secret political associations spread propaganda leaflets saying that the Free Thai leader, the former minister to the United States, Mom Seni, was preparing to enter Thailand. The leaflets went on to say that "when he does enter the country the whole Thai people must rise to liberate Thailand and destroy the Japanese Army and Japanese Nationals in Thailand."<sup>10</sup>

Another disconcerting incident occurred at a session of the Thai National Assembly on the 12th July. When a "member of the opposition party" asked whether Bangkok could be proclaimed an "open city", and whether "inquiries had been made in regard to disarming the city", the Defense Minister replied that "we have heard nothing from the enemy" and that anyway "there would be others who would object." The "opposition member" then commented that "if the Japanese would leave Bangkok, the Thai people would be very grateful."<sup>11</sup>

On 14 August '45, when the Emperor broadcasted the acceptance of the Potsdam ultimatum terms, Japanese Ambassador Yamamoto replied as follows:

"We have received the Imperial Rescript and our grief knows no bounds. In obedience to the Imperial will and the purport of the Emperor's instructions, I and the officials with me all will do our utmost to set His Majesty's mind at peace through the fulfillment of the duties (? left to us by our leaders?) and through the guarding and maintaining of the prosperity of the Imperial Throne."<sup>12</sup>

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10. 9 July 1945, 667, H-196031.
  11. DS 1219, 27 July 1945.
  12. 15 August 1945, 822, Special 85.

At present (17 August) nothing is available from the Japanese army in Thailand.

On 11 August Ambassador Yamamoto was requested by the G.I.A. Ministry to convey to the Thai Government a message stating that Thailand should "begin the necessary peace overtures immediately in concert with Japan." The message went on to say that "It is, as always, Japan's heartfelt desires that Thailand preserve until the last its status as the leading independent country in East Asia." However, on the 12th Yamamoto replied that he had not yet communicated the surrender news to the Thai officials because he feared that the Army would object, and asked Tokyo to "get the approval of the Army and Navy as quickly as possible in regard to these representations." \* As of 17 August, Thailand had not begun any peace overtures.

In Indo-China the Japanese have also been having difficulties. Before the Japanese took action against the French rulers of Indo-China, there had been an active underground Independence League. After the French had been ousted, this league became anti-Japanese as well as anti-French, and as a result of their activities the Annamese Government began to show tendencies to resist Japanese control and to make strong demands for the return of Annamese territory to its own jurisdiction. As a result of Annamese pressure, which included a threatened resignation of the Cabinet, the Japanese decided early in July to ease the restriction on Annamese

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\* DS. 14 August 1945.



authority and to take steps to restore the French colony of Cochin-China to Annam. In spite of Japanese action to appease the Annamese group and curtail the activity of the anti-Japanese factions, friction and discontentment continued in Indo-China.<sup>13</sup>

In August when the Potsdam Ultimatum was being accepted, affairs in Indo-China seem confused. On 12 August Minister Tsukamoto \* dispatched the following message to Tokyo:

" 1. We learned of the Government's proposal to the four Powers from DOMEI wires and broadcasts from the various countries on the evening of the 10th. We immediately got in touch with various quarters and made preparations for the maintenance of peace and order; we decided then to await \_\_\_\_\_ instructions. On the same evening important people among the military, government and civilian population all bore doleful expressions, but there were no signs of unrest.

2. As we forbade any announcement of this news, it has not yet become generally known; so that up until evening today the 12th, the Chinese, French, and Annamese have not sensed that anything is wrong. Only the (?French?) and Annamese, feeling that Soviet participation will speed the end of the war and fearing the ensuing terror are \_\_\_\_\_ apprehension. We have seen no (?indications?) of deep-seated unrest.

3. We know from Washington broadcasts in the morning of the 12th that the four Powers had (? issued a reply?); in general the day passed without occurrence of anything unusual, but there are among the main body of the commissioned army officers some who say that the peace offer, etc., are demagogueries perpetrated by the United States and England and that the Minister of War has given orders that the army fight to the bitter end.<sup>14</sup>

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13. DS 1225, 2 August 1945.

\* Minister Tsukamoto replaced Ambassador Matsumoto (who went to Tokyo for duty in foreign office) in May '45. Tsukamoto serves at the Japanese Embassy in Hanoi.

14. 12 August 1945,

H-201397.



On the following day (August 13th) Tsukamoto sent this message to Tokyo:

"I have learned, as the result of a casual talk with the Army Commander, that the situation in this area is as I describe below: Foreign broadcasts since the night of the 10th have come as a great shock to the local populace. Their particular fear of the return of the French leads them to entreat Japan to prevent the French return at all costs. While their desire is, of course Independence, if we could prevent this one thing it seems that they would be content to be placed under international control (trusteeship), irregardless of whatever (formalities?) might be involved. This, I believe, is the fervent hope of \_\_\_\_\_ (all of?) the people." 15

According to our USA broadcasts on the morning of the 17th August, the Emperor of Japan has despatched a representative to Indo-China to order the disarmament of the troops serving in that area. At the time of the Indo-China "incident" (March) there were about 67,000 troops within that area; then in June the total increased to 110,000. However, in July the 37th Division and the 70th Indian Mixed Brigade moved to Northern Malaya, and the 22nd Division was scheduled to move to Thailand. When and if the 22nd Division departs, the 21st Division will be the only major unit carried in Northern French Indo-China, but if the 55th Div. from Burma arrives in Indo-China as scheduled the total will again be restored. 16

The air power of the Burma, Thailand, and Indo-China sector has decreased during July 1945. On 5th July, 151 planes were estimated in that area, then by 2 August the total was reduced to 66 planes. 17

15. 13 August 1945, \_\_\_\_\_, H-201396.

16. "Order of Battle Bulletin Japanese Ground Forces" #57, 7 April 1945; #73, 16 June '45.

17. FES, 5 July 1945, FES 2 August 1945.



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(II) MALAYA AND THE NETHERLAND EAST INDIES

Current traffic has indicated that the keynote of Japanese defense in this Southern Pacific area had been planned to center around Singapore. This assignment was given to the Commander of the Seventh Area Army (HQ Singapore):

"He will hold the strategic areas in Malaya, Sumatra, Java and Borneo and will destroy the invading enemy. In particular, he will hold the sector around Singapore."<sup>18</sup>

With this object in mind, the Japanese planned for the withdrawal of troops from the Andaman Islands, Lesser Sunda Islands and from various islands West of New Guinea. The troops withdrawn from these areas were to move to the Singapore area "as quickly as possible, in view of the urgency of reinforcing Singapore."

During May the Japanese planned two withdrawal attempts from the Andaman Islands but both times the Japanese ships were sunk while en-route to the Islands. However, by 15 June the Japanese had still not abandoned the withdrawal plans. A message from the Tenth Area Fleet (HQ Singapore) stated that success could not be expected "by ordinary methods" then suggested that one or more former German submarines be assigned to the tenth area fleet to be used to withdraw the troops from the Andaman Islands. However, as of July 28th, the 23,000 troops still remained on those Islands.<sup>19</sup>

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18. FES, 6 July 1945.

19. FES, 16 June 1945; FES, 6 July 1945.

The withdrawal plans for the Lesser Sunda Islands began early in '45. Because transportation was difficult, it required more than three months to move the 46th Division to Java and two heavy cruisers were lost during these operations. On 1 June the seventh Area Army directed the withdrawal of the 48th Division. That withdrawal (if successful) would have left the Lesser Sundas virtually undefended.<sup>20</sup>

Now that the decision had been made to withdraw the 48th Division from the Islands, the important problem was transportation. On 6 June the second Army (HQ Pinrang SW Celebes) submitted to the Southern Army a proposal for using a hospital ship to solve the transportation problems of the proposed withdrawal.<sup>21</sup> This proposal was accepted and the following plans were made concerning the secrecy of the hospital ship: "In order to keep secret the movement of the hospital ship Tachibana Maru (1,722 grt) we should like from now on to call her the Sea Truk Hirose Maru, thus preventing the appearance of her name in operational orders and messages."<sup>22</sup>

The first trip for the "Sea Truk Hirose Maru" was planned from Java to Timor and return.\* The 48th Division at Dilli (Timor) was given detailed

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20. FES, 4 June 1945.

21. FES, 11 June 1945.

22. FES, 15 June 1945.

\* It is interesting to note that the Japanese were still carrying on negotiations with the Portuguese for the withdrawal of the Japanese troops from Timor when this scheduled operation took place. The Japanese deliberately planned to stall with the negotiations until the withdrawal from Portuguese Timor had been completed. On 1 June they stated that the "negotiations would be delayed until the end of 1945." (1 June 1945, #36, J-64414).



instruction for the trip. The soldiers were to become patients in hospital garments and the ordnance and ammunition was to be carefully packed in boxes marked "medical supplies".<sup>23</sup> A 16 July message disclosed that the "Sea Truk" had completed her first run successfully; 1406 soldiers of the 48th Division, 217 "seriously ill patients" and 1929 cases of "unit baggage", had been transported to Java.<sup>24</sup>

The next scheduled trip for the "Sea Truk" was to be a run to Toeal in the Kai Islands (SW of New Guinea) where she was again to be used to evacuate troops (the entire force of the 11th Inf. Regt.) and ordnance. Again the same detailed instructions were given but the 11th Inf. Regt. was greatly concerned about carrying the regimental colors aboard the hospital ship, and they requested: "Since it is not fitting to keep the regimental colors on the ship, please give your consideration to transporting them by air from Toeal to Surabaya."<sup>25</sup> So the 11th Regiment boarded the "Sea Truk" (probably without their colors). But this time the hospital ship did not reach her destination, for the "Sea Truk Hirose Maru" was boarded and taken into custody by U. S. naval units on 4 August 1945. With the loss of the hospital ship the Japanese were faced with finding another means of transporting the 28,000 troops remaining on the Lesser Sunda Islands.

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23. FES, 11 July 1945.

24. FES, 24 July 1945.

25. FES, 3 August 1945.

In addition to the troops stranded in the Lesser Sunda Islands, there are 53,000 in the Celebes, Halmahera area; 57,000 in the Dutch New Guinea, Banda Sea sector; and 15,000 in East New Guinea.<sup>26</sup>

The air strength of the Malaya Sumatra, Andaman sector has remained consistently around the 200-250 mark during June and July. The air strength of the Java, Netherland East Indies area has remained fairly consistently around 80 planes.<sup>27</sup>

This month (August) the Japanese were preparing to grant independence to the East Indies. On 7 August, Independence Preparatory Committees were to be established in Java, the Celebes, Borneo, the Lesser Sundas and Ambon. Actual independence was to be declared during the first part of September. At that time the Japanese Empire planned to recognize the new state which was then "to declare war on America, England and Holland." However, beneath the flowery independence plans there was the familiar theme of Japanese guidance for the new states. The instructions regarding the political life after independence included: "the Japanese military employees will control and guide the new states," and "important points relative to the government which affect the entire area will be referred to the supreme military commander." After the announcement of independence "an intensive propaganda campaign of Thanks" was to be carried out.<sup>28</sup>

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26. Figures from "order of Battle Bulletin Japanese Ground Forces", #73, 28 July 1945.  
27. Figures from FES 7 June thru 2 August 1945.  
28. Chief of Staff 2nd Southern Expeditionary Fleet, Aog. 080500, 070720, 051725, 032355, 061420, 061425.



On 15 August 1945, while the Japanese Army Commander of the Southern Pacific Area awaited the completed surrender terms and the visit from the representative of the Emperor, the order was given to "all units in the East Indies to maintain a strict lookout and precautions, and if the enemy makes a visit, they are to make every effort to annihilate him".<sup>29</sup> The effect of the visit and the signed surrender terms on these isolated army divisions remains to be seen.

(III) SUMMARY

Available traffic indicates that the Japanese intended to maintain their present forces in Thailand and Indo-China and to strengthen those forces by Divisions retreating from Burma. They also intended to hold strategic areas in Malaya, Sumatra, Java, and Borneo with the importance of holding the sector around Singapore as their basic object. To strengthen their forces and arms in those areas the Japanese have attempted to withdraw troops and ordnance from the Andaman Islands, Lesser Sunda Islands, and from various islands west of New Guinea. That project proved extremely difficult.

Prior to the acceptance of the Potsdam Ultimatum by the Emperor, the Japanese were having considerable difficulty in Burma, Thailand and Indo-China since the people were becoming anti-Japanese, and enemy agents had penetrated the countrysides. For the Netherland East Indies the Japanese

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29. Comdr., Base Force 11, Aug. 160430, FRUEF-160954.

had planned Independence, which was to take place in September '45.

After the broadcast by Hirohito accepting the surrender terms of the Allies, Thailand was also to surrender, and the Japanese Ambassador in Bangkok pledged full cooperation to his government. In Indo-China and the East Indies the Japanese army and diplomats seemed in a state of confusion during and immediately after the surrender negotiations. Perhaps that atmosphere will be cleared by a visit from the Emperor's representative and the actual signing of the surrender documents.