

most historical accounts suggest, but that the preoccupation with issues of 'deprivation' fell short of an autonomous political agenda of the urban poor.

Written in a pleasant style, material and argument could have been presented more concisely in some parts. This would have left some space for extending the analysis to a more meaningful historical watershed than the beginning of World War II. Following up the developments to the 1950s could have taught us more about the creation of the political space the labouring poor came to inhabit after independence. The book raises many other important questions. Some readers may be provoked by Goopu's reintroduction of 'class' as a prominent analytical category. It is a timely provocation.

Ravi Ahuja

JOHN A. L. HAMILTON, *War Bush. 81 (West African) Division in Burma 1943–1945*. Norwich: Michael Russell, 2001. 400 pages, illustrations, maps, tables, £ 25.00. ISBN 0-85955-267-5

When Hamilton's book *War Bush. 81 (West African) Division in Burma 1943–1945* appeared in 2001, Southeast Asian historians still hardly acknowledged or talked about the West African involvement in Burma during the last three years of World War II, though the West African divisions played an important role in the struggle against the Japanese, most especially in the capture of Myohaung, the ancient capital of Arakan.

The British colonial possession of Burma was a rich prize for the Japanese – partly on account of its natural resources, partly as a stepping stone westward to India, partly as a buffer against the Chinese in the North and Northeast. The Japanese had reached Burma in December 1941, and had consolidated their position there by the end of 1942. Recapturing the country would take the Allies' 14th Army, which had nearly one million men in its service, three years of desperate fighting. Thirteen divisions were under control of the 14th Army, eight Indian divisions, two West African divisions, two British divisions, and one East African division.

Hamilton's book is dedicated to the 81st (West African) Division of the 14th Army, which was made up of about 23,000 West Africans from Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast, who fought in Burma (officially) as volunteers. Hamilton's research is mainly based on records and personal notes of the British involved in the war in Burma. Some few native African remembrances were investigated, too, but the Burmese view itself is missing completely.

The book starts with an introduction that gives an overview of the historical background to the war in Burma, and describes Japan's threat to the frontier of British India. In the first chapter, Hamilton gives details about the shipping of West African soldiers to India, their training there, and their move to the front

in Burma. Chapter 2 deals with the movement down the Kaladan river from Daletme to Kyauktaw, while chapter 3 is dedicated to the "disaster" at Kyauktaw: a hard battle at Kyauktaw with heavy fighting at Pagoda Hill, which was a main post of the Japanese.

In chapter 4, Hamilton describes the further movement from Kyauktaw to Kyingri Loop with heavy fighting around Pagoda Hill near the end of the dry season, when the African division went through a crisis. Supply of water had become a problem, and in addition there were many casualties in the division, so that the morale among the soldiers declined.

Chapter 5 tells us about the movement from Kaladan village to the Kalapanzin river, where several important operations took place. Rivers (as transport ways) and hills (as strategic vantage points) were main targets of the forces. The strength of the African divisions was that they were able to move rapidly over mountainous jungle country where no road existed and where not even pack animals could pass. But, on the other hand, it was difficult for them to control plain areas without jungle vegetation.

When the Japanese reached Paletwa, Gambian companies were sent to attack their positions. The sixth chapter of the book deals with that hard, but successful battle at Frontier Hill near Paletwa. The two following chapters are dedicated to the monsoon period of 1944 during which the African division was engaged in two long campaigns in the Kaladan valley.

The further movement that is described in chapter 9 went from Auklo to Tinma. After the monsoon, the new objectives were to establish and strengthen the division in the area around Kaladan village – Bidonegyaungwa from where it was possible to take action against Kyauktaw and Thayattabin.

Chapter 10 deals with the final movement from Tinma to Myohaung between December 1944 and February 1945. First the division established an important post near Lemro river, and on February 14 it finally succeeded in storming Myohaung. The following three chapters are dedicated to the involvement and actions of the West African Chindits in the Burma war. "Chindits" was a general designation of Special Forces, the African Chindits were also known as "Nigerian Rifles" or "King's African Rifles".

Some facts concerning the 81 (West African) Recce Regiment (Reconnaissance Company) that fought on the Mayu front near the Kalapanzin and Mayu rivers against the Japanese, are presented in chapter 14. Chapters 15 and 16 describe the return of the division to India, where the soldiers were stationed at Madras until they finally returned to their African home countries. Transports took place throughout the year 1945. Hamilton also discusses some problems of demobilisation and post-war activities.

In the last chapter the reader finds a review of recent research on the Burma campaign. Hamilton criticises that in the British annals of the Burma campaign

much emphasis is put on the Indian divisions, but the efforts and successes of the West African troops are completely ignored or underrated.

In the 25 page appendix the reader will find additional information such as lists of commanders, biographies of the Generals C.G. Woolner and F.J.L. Tottenham, statistical data on casualties, approved honors and awards, auxiliary groups, air supply etc. Some poems by African soldiers are added to give an impression of the atmosphere in the jungle. A ten page bibliography lists the original sources analysed by the author, and gives important bibliographical data for further reading and research.

Not only does Hamilton's work provide very detailed information on the history of the Burma campaign and many facts concerning the movements and the battles, it also describes the natural environment and aspects of everyday life of the African soldiers, their experiences in the jungle and in villages, and their relationship with their European (mostly British and Polish) officers. As such it is a valuable source for further research. Although Hamilton does not critically discuss the involvement of Africans (as well as Indians) in the war under the British forces, the book should be acknowledged and appreciated most especially in the field of Southeast Asian studies, since there is still a lack of knowledge about the African involvement in Southeast Asian history.

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ASHLEY SOUTH, *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma. The Golden Sheldrake*. London: RoutledgeCurzon 2003. xxii, 419 pages, 3 maps, 1 table, £ 55.00. ISBN 0-7007-1609-2

Right from its foundation in 1948, the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state of Burma has accumulated a sad record of constant internal unrest and civil war – as Charles Keyes recently remarked, it has perhaps more independence movements per square mile than any other state in the world. One of the major participants in this war, the Mons of Lower Burma, are portrayed in this book.

The book starts with an introduction in two parts, the first containing a summary of the history of the Mon people in Burma and beyond. As the author admits right at the outset of the chapter, this is neither his true field of expertise, nor is it the major subject of the book, so it may seem inappropriate to criticize this part too harshly. However, it contains too many mistakes, wrong spellings and doubtful statements to remain completely silent about them. To list but a small selection chosen at random: I have never come across a single reference to Mon monks visiting Sri Lanka in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (p. 59); both the existence of king Anawrahta and his campaign in Lower Burma are attested by a great deal of votive tablets bearing his name (perhaps even his signature), which he left at religious sites all over Burma (p. 66); the word for king-to-be must read *min-laung* and not *min-luang* (p. 62, 77, 89); "Sinhalese" is spelt without double