



HISTORY OF THE  
SECOND WORLD WAR

*The War  
against Japan*

Volume III

MAJOR-GENERAL S. WOODBURN KIRBY,  
C.B., C.M.G., C.I.E., O.B.E., M.C.

with

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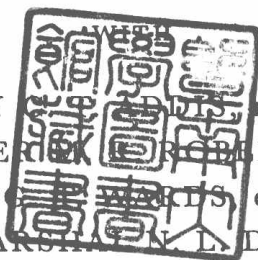
VOLUME III

## The Decisive Battles

BY

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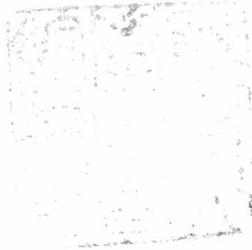
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HISTORY OF  
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## INTRODUCTION

**V**OLUME I of this series of five recounted briefly the events which led to the outbreak of war with Japan and described the Japanese advance through Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaya, Singapore and the Netherlands East Indies. Volume II told of the loss of Burma and the period of frustration which followed, during which the abortive attempt was made to recapture Akyab. It described how India Command set to work to reorganize, re-equip and train the army and air forces in preparation for the reoccupation of Burma, to build up India as a base and to improve the lines of communication to the north-eastern frontier. Like Volume I it is mainly a sombre record of disaster, lightened only by a description of the operations of the Chindits in the heart of enemy occupied Burma, by a brief account of the war in the Pacific, where the naval victories of the Coral Sea and Midway checked and then halted the Japanese advance, and of the dour fighting in the Solomons and in Papua which wrested the initiative from them.

The present volume has a brighter tale to tell. It begins with the planning in the autumn of 1943 for a general Allied offensive in 1944 to reoccupy Burma and the establishment of an Allied command in South-East Asia under a British Supreme Commander, Acting-Admiral Lord Mountbatten. It describes how the Eastern Fleet, steadily built up with ships freed by the surrender of Italy in September 1943, was eventually able to operate with impunity off the coast of Sumatra and Java from bases in Ceylon. It shows how the R.A.F. in India, greatly expanded and re-equipped with up-to-date aircraft and integrated with an enlarged American army air force, was able to challenge Japanese air supremacy with such effect that, by the middle of 1944, it had established air superiority over the whole of Burma.

It explains how one after another the plans for 1944 had to be abandoned owing to the withdrawal of most of the landing craft for the invasion of Europe, and to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's refusal to allow the Yunnan armies to take the offensive, and how gradually, under American pressure, the main strategical object in South-East Asia became the capture of Myitkyina and the building of a road and pipeline to China to supplement the airlift over the Hump. It recounts in some detail how the enemy offensives in Arakan and into Assam brought about the decisive battles of the war in South-East Asia which culminated in the defeat of the Japanese at Kohima and Imphal and the passing of the initiative to the Allies. It is therefore the key volume of the series.

A number of chapters have been devoted to the second campaign of the Chindits, now called Special Force and increased from two to six brigades. These operations, which were made much of in the contemporary press, are shown to have contributed less to the victories of 1944 than was popularly thought at the time. They underline once again that unorthodox forces or 'private armies' are wasteful and, though they can be of assistance to conventional forces, cannot by themselves win victories. These chapters also cover the final stages of Stilwell's advance down the Hukawng and Mogaung valleys, the capture of Kamaing and Myitkyina by the American/Chinese forces and of Mogaung, mainly by the Chindits.

The length of the lines of communication between the main bases in India and the north-eastern frontier, the lack of communications across the border between the Imphal plain and the Chindwin, the mountainous nature of the country on the borders of Assam and Burma and the climatic conditions which, during the monsoon, frequently made movement on land impossible and in the air extremely hazardous, created immense administrative problems. Including those of air supply, these have been described in some detail as they arose and it has been shown how they were solved.

As in previous volumes, the war in the Pacific has been described in outline, for, without a knowledge of events in that theatre, the reader would be unable to keep the war as a whole in proper perspective and grasp the significance of the overall strategy for the defeat of Japan. Unlike the previous volumes, this volume has devoted space to military events within China where some twenty-five Japanese divisions were tied down throughout the war. The Japanese offensive to wrest the airfields in south-eastern China from the Allies and the abortive Chinese offensive across the Salween are described.

We wish to express our gratitude to the relatives of the late Major-General Orde Wingate for permission to make use of his papers. We are indebted to Admiral of the Fleet Earl Mountbatten of Burma, Field Marshal Viscount Slim, General Sir George Giffard and to many other officers too numerous to mention here by name who have been good enough to read our drafts and send us their comments. We must also thank Mr. Gardner, Chief of the U.S. Foreign Histories Division and his staff for information from Japanese sources and for research carried out in Japan on our behalf, and Mr. Gavin Long, the General Editor of the Australian War History, who has kindly assisted us in connection with the New Guinea campaign.

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narratives prepared by Squadron-Leader W. M. Gould and Mr. D. Craik of the Air Historical Branch, Air Ministry.

Our thanks are due to the Cabinet Office Mapping Section under Colonel T. M. M. Penney for the preparation of the many maps and sketches with which the volume is illustrated, to Miss M. M. Baird, Miss R. J. F. Hughes and Miss R. B. Harbottle for their careful research work and for the secretarial assistance given by Miss A. E. Davidson.

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S.W.K.  
C.T.A.  
M.R.R.  
G.T.W.  
N.L.D.

*“All plans in the dubious hazard of war must have . . . risks; the great commander is he who has both the courage to accept them and the skill to minimize them.”*

(Field-Marshal Viscount Wavell, *Allenby, Soldier and Statesman*,  
Harrap, 1946)

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