

CHINA OFFENSIVE



The U.S. Army Campaigns
of World War II

Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was initially prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Theresa L. Kraus. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.

JOHN W. MOUNTCASTLE
Brigadier General, USA
Chief of Military History

China Offensive

5 May–2 September 1945

As victory in Europe appeared increasingly inevitable in the early months of 1945, the Allies began to focus greater military resources on the war against Japan. Throughout the spring of 1945 Allied forces drove the Japanese from Burma and dislodged Japanese forces from key islands in the central and southwest Pacific. With its sea power shattered and its air power outmatched, Japan's only remaining resource was its relatively intact ground force. Although the land campaigns in Burma and the Philippines had been disastrous for the engaged Japanese forces, those and other outlying garrisons represented only a small percent of its ground troops. The bulk of Japan's army of over two million men was on the mainland of Asia, primarily in China.

Suffering from the travails of a civil war that had begun in 1911, and from pervasive economic problems, China had lost much of its enthusiasm for the struggle against the Japanese. Since 1937, when the Sino-Japanese conflict became an open war, China's best troops had been repeatedly defeated and its richest coastal and riverine cities captured by the Japanese. From the beginning of World War II, Allied planners believed it would be essential to assist China in its war against Japan, but had not regarded it as a decisive theater. Unable to deploy ground forces for operations there, the United States provided air and logistical support, technical assistance, and military advice to the Chinese army for its continuing struggle against the Japanese.

Strategic Setting

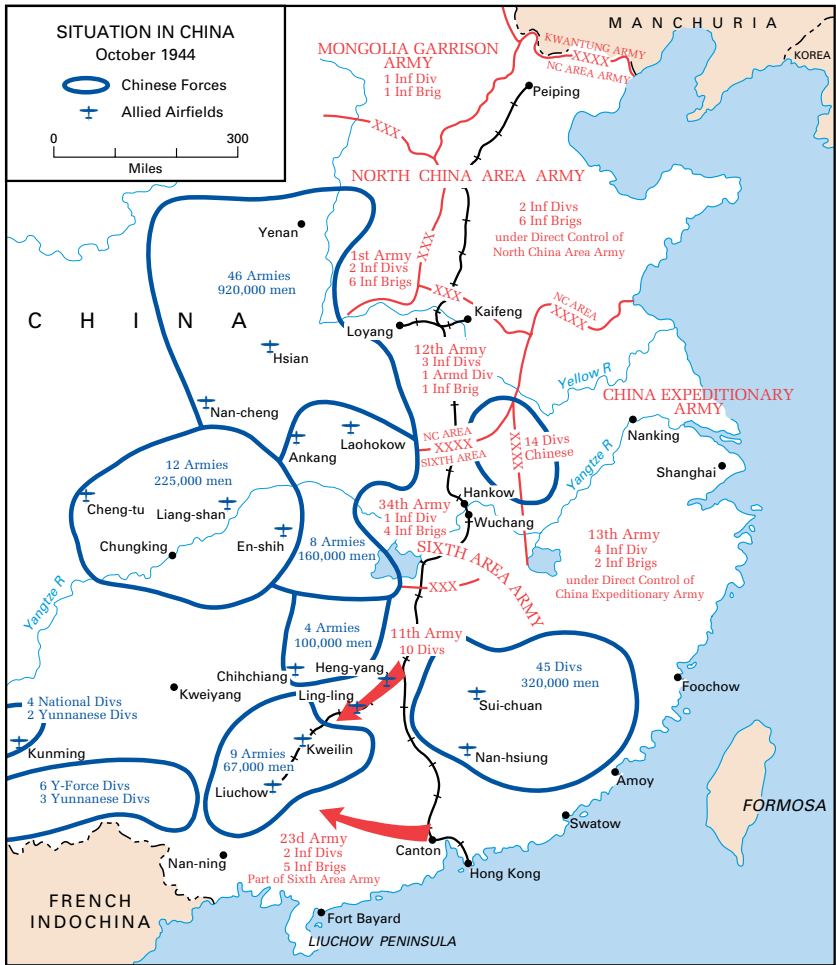
Although the ultimate goal of the Allies was the complete expulsion of the Japanese from Chinese soil, that proved a difficult task for both political and economic reasons. Chinese military forces belonged to two hostile camps, the Nationalist army of the pro-Western Kuomintang government commanded by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and the Communist "Red" Army of Mao Tse-tung. A latent civil war between the Nationalists and Communists had sharply limited efforts to protect Chinese territory from foreign aggression. Although the two factions had agreed to fight the Japanese instead of each other, the ensuing alliance was at best an uneasy truce. Attempts to coordinate their efforts against the Japanese were markedly unsuccessful. By 1945 Chiang's army was centered at the emergency capital of

Chungking, 900 miles to the west of coastal Shanghai, and Mao's forces were based 500 miles north of Chungking in equally remote Yen-an. The Allies provided material assistance to the Nationalist army, but dissension among the Nationalist factions made it impossible for Chiang Kai-shek to consolidate his military forces in an effort to combat both the Communists and the Japanese. In fact, both the Communists and the Nationalists held the major part of their armies in reserve, ready to resume their civil war once Japan's fate had been decided elsewhere.

Severe economic problems made it difficult for Chiang Kai-shek to sustain his army in the field. China had no industrial base to support the prolonged war, and the Japanese occupation and blockade had made it increasingly hard for the Allies to ship supplies into the country. For logistical support, the Nationalist army depended on the limited Allied tonnage flown over the 14,000-foot Himalayas mountain chain, the so-called Hump, from India into southern China. Previously, those supplies had been delivered by road, but the fall of Burma to the Japanese in 1942 closed that route. No large-scale offensive could be mounted as long as the supply situation remained critical. Early Allied plans for the China theater thus concentrated on supporting Nationalist forces with advice, training assistance, and critical supplies and on establishing air bases from which to conduct strategic bombing attacks against Japan. Eventually, Allied leaders hoped to seize the ports of Hong Kong and Canton, some 700 miles southeast of Chungking, allowing them to establish a maritime supply line to China.

U.S. leaders initially expected little from the Chinese Army. Theoretically, Chiang's army was the largest in the world. In reality, it consisted mostly of ill-equipped, inadequately trained, poorly organized, and ineptly led units. Many soldiers suffered from malnutrition and clothing shortages. Although an administrative system that was primitive at best prevented western observers from making any useful estimates of the precise size and capabilities of the somewhat amorphous mass of troops, clearly it had been unable to halt an enemy advance or fight a modern war since the very beginning of the struggle. Mao's forces, if better motivated, were even less well equipped and, by 1945, were focusing most of their efforts at establishing guerrilla and clandestine political organizations behind the Japanese lines, rather than opposing them directly.

Command problems also plagued the Nationalist forces. All operational plans and decisions originated from Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters in Chungking. But the Generalissimo had little contact with his troops and was often completely out of touch with battle sit-



uations. Nevertheless, he generally refused to allow his field commanders to adjust their forces in response to local combat conditions without his personal approval. Unable to coordinate large-scale operations, the Chinese generals normally committed their units in a piecemeal fashion, accomplishing little against the Japanese. Mao's forces were not much better as their decentralized organization limited their ability to conduct conventional warfare. China's only indigenous protection lay in the size of the country and the lack of a well-developed transportation network, which imposed severe handicaps on the invaders.

Japanese military forces occupied the eastern third of the country and controlled all of the seaports and main railroads and highways. General Yasuji Okamura commanded the undefeated, veteran *China Expeditionary Army*, consisting of 1 armored division, 25 infantry divisions, and 22 independent brigades—11 of infantry, 1 of cavalry, and 10 of mixed troops. General Okamura divided those forces into three separate groups: The *North China Area Army* occupied the north China plain from the Yellow River to the Great Wall and kept watch, along with the large Japanese army in Manchuria (*Kwangtung Army*), on the Soviet forces in the Far East. To the south, the *13th Army* held the lower Yangtze River valley and the coast north and south of the port city of Shanghai. The *6th Area Army* was immediately west of the *13th Army* and extended south to Canton and Hong Kong on the coast. The *6th Area Army*, which contained the elite of the Japanese units, operated against the Chinese and Americans in central China. Despite the large number of units, the size of the country and the absence of a more developed transportation net immobilized much of the Japanese army and limited the extent of its operations. With most of its troops committed to pacification or occupation, and without strong air support or an adequate logistics system, the Japanese operated only with difficulty outside of their lodgment areas.

On 18 October 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt recalled the U.S. commander of the China-Burma-India theater and chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek, Lt. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, to the United States. Stilwell, in command since March 1942, had long been at odds with the Generalissimo. The American general's low opinion of Chiang and his troops was well known, keeping the relationship between adviser and advisee perpetually strained. Not surprisingly, when President Roosevelt had suggested that Stilwell be given command of the Chinese forces in August 1944, the Generalissimo adamantly rejected the proposal. Stilwell's recall decided the resulting political and military deadlock in favor of Chiang, but the Generalissimo's troubles were far from over.

Subsequently, Roosevelt divided the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations into two parts. Lt. Gen. Daniel I. Sultan took command of the India-Burma theater, and Lt. Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer arrived in China on 31 October 1944 to become the commanding general of the U.S. forces in the China theater and chief of staff to Chiang Kai-shek. The Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed Wedemeyer to advise and assist the Generalissimo on all matters pertaining to the conduct of the war against the Japanese, including training, logistical support, and operational planning for the Chinese Nationalist forces.

Before World War II General Wedemeyer had served tours in the Philippine Islands and in China. More recently, his experience as a member of the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff gave him the perspective and experience needed to develop strategic plans for China. Furthermore, he had become familiar with the Chinese army and acquainted with Chiang Kai-shek while serving as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Southeast Asia Command under Lord Mountbatten, before his appointment to the China theater. Unlike his predecessor, Wedemeyer quickly established an excellent working relationship with Chiang.

The American forces in China were a varied lot, reflecting the diverse nature of their missions. The B-29s of the XX Bomber Command, under Maj. Gen. Curtis LeMay, were controlled by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, not General Wedemeyer. The long-range bombers had a strategic offensive mission, striking from their bases in India and China at targets as far away as Formosa, Manchuria, and southern Japan. Wedemeyer also had no direct authority over the China Wing, India-China Division, Air Transport Command, commanded by Brig. Gen. William H. Turner, charged with ferrying troops and supplies within China and flying the Hump.

Of those American forces under Wedemeyer's direct control, the Fourteenth Air Force, commanded by Maj. Gen. Claire L. Chennault, was the most significant. Because of the weakness of Chiang's army and the lack of adequate roads and railways, Chennault's mixed force of fighters, medium and heavy bombers, and transport aircraft was vital to keeping supplies flowing to the Chinese troops and their American advisers and in attempting to halt Japanese excursions into Chinese-held territory. Other than air units, Wedemeyer had only a small number of ground force personnel. Most were advising and training parts of the Chinese army, particularly a number of American-sponsored divisions.

As much of the staff for the old China-Burma-India Theater of Operations had been located in India, Wedemeyer's new headquarters was extremely small. Initially, he reorganized it into two main elements. A forward echelon in Chungking, the wartime capital of China, dealt primarily with operations, intelligence, and planning. A rear echelon at Kunming, some 400 miles southwest of Chungking and the China terminus for the Hump air supply line, handled administrative and logistical matters. The commander of Wedemeyer's Services of Supply, Maj. Gen. Gilbert X. Cheves, headed the latter.

Almost immediately, Wedemeyer was faced with a major crisis. In October 1944, provoked by American bomber raids from China on

southern Japan, the Japanese began a major offensive to eliminate the airfields used for staging the air attacks. On 11 November, less than two weeks after Wedemeyer's arrival in China, the *Japanese Eleventh Army* captured Kweilin, 400 miles southeast of Chungking and one of the Fourteenth Air Force's largest bases. The *Twenty-Third Army*, moving west from the Canton area, seized another air base at Liuchow, 100 miles southwest of Kweilin. From Liuchow the Japanese moved southwest toward Nanning, some 150 miles away. On 24 November the town fell, allowing the Japanese to establish tenuous overland communications across all of eastern Asia between Korea and Singapore. By mid-November many of the major airfields used by the U.S. Fourteenth Air Force and the XX Bomber Command in China had been occupied, and Japanese forces shifted their advance westward toward Kunming and Chungking. Both of these cities were critical: if Kunming fell, the Hump aerial supply line would be cut; if Chungking, Chiang's wartime capital, was lost, the blow to Nationalist prestige and authority might be fatal.

In attempting to halt the Japanese offensive, the Chinese forces had performed poorly. Wedemeyer recognized that before the Chinese army could be successful, at least part of it must be transformed into an effective combat force. Under the threat of further Japanese advances against Kunming and Chungking, Chiang agreed to the creation of a force of thirty-six infantry divisions under a single responsible Chinese field commander and a combined Chinese-American staff. The divisions, which were referred to as the ALPHA Force after a plan of defense, code-named ALPHA, would be equipped, trained, and supplied by Americans.

Although Chiang's agreement to the ALPHA Force plan was a major victory for the American advisory mission, Wedemeyer did not achieve all that he had sought. Chiang, concerned that Mao Tse-tung might turn some of his three-million-man Communist military force against Nationalist strongholds, refused to permit the Americans to train more than thirty-six divisions, only about 15 percent of the total Chinese army. More significant, the Generalissimo kept many of his best soldiers out of the ALPHA divisions and in reserve near Chungking.

For an immediate defense against the advancing Japanese, Wedemeyer turned to Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force and also requested the return of two American-equipped and -trained Chinese divisions from Burma and India. But, fortunately for the hastily formed and relatively unprepared ALPHA force, the Japanese had outrun their supplies by mid-December and were forced to halt their



“Welcome” China 1945 by John G. Hanlen. (Army Art Collection)

advance to the west. Chennault’s airmen now began systematically attacking Japanese supply centers and railways to prevent a buildup of supplies to support additional Japanese offensives. More and better aircraft, including the new P-51 fighter-bombers with their great range, along with an increased flow of supplies over the Hump, allowed the Fourteenth to wage a heavy and sustained bombing attack whose cumulative effect on the Japanese was serious. The 6th Area Army, most immediately affected by the air strikes, concluded that the severe shortage of fuel and the impending collapse of rail communications might soon force them to abandon south China, an estimate of which the Americans and Chinese remained ignorant.

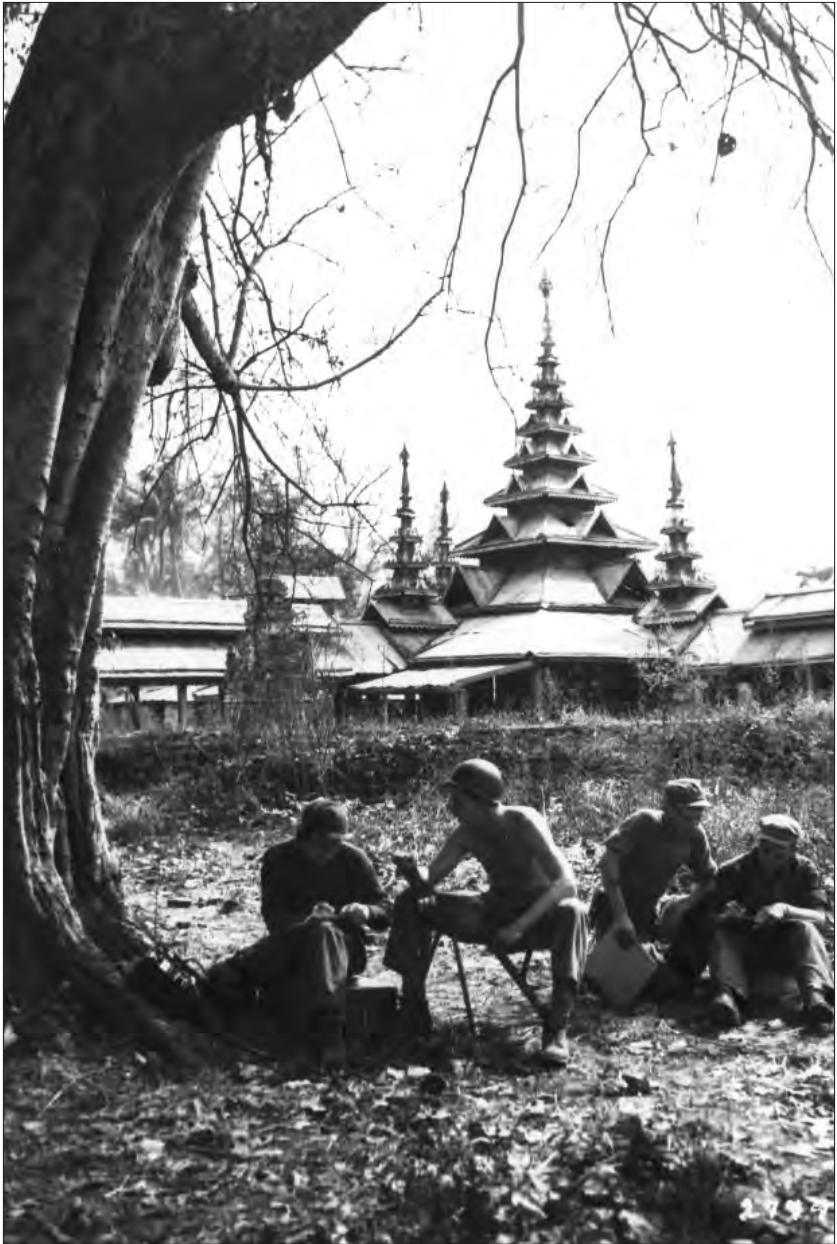
Japanese supply difficulties and the Fourteenth Air Force’s raids had bought part of the time needed for the ALPHA divisions to be turned into an effective combat force. Moreover, increased tonnage flown over the Hump and the imminent success in Burma, which would reopen the ground supply route to China, made it likely that the equipment and supplies for the ALPHA divisions would arrive in a timely manner. The missing piece in creating the ALPHA Force was a

more effective organization to train, supply, and control the operations of the divisions. Recognizing this, General Wedemeyer, in January 1945, established the Chinese Combat Command and the Chinese Training Command.

The Chinese Combat Command, headed by Maj. Gen. Robert B. McClure, was designed to make the advisory effort more effective in the face of Chinese practices and attitudes that had caused problems in the past. The key issue was leverage. McClure wanted every Chinese ALPHA Force commander down to regimental level to have an American adviser. If a Chinese commander refused to accept the advice of the American working with him, the matter would be referred to their next higher Chinese and American superiors, ultimately ending up with Chiang Kai-shek and General Wedemeyer. Any Chinese commander who continually refused to follow advice would be replaced or have American support withdrawn from his unit.

Personnel shortages prevented the system from being extended to the regimental level, but eventually all 36 divisions, 12 armies, and 4 group armies of the ALPHA Force received American advisers and liaison personnel, some 3,100 soldiers and airmen, all linked by radio. Each advisory team had about twenty-five officers and fifty enlisted men, picked from different arms and services so that qualified technicians from ordnance, logistics, and engineer specialties would be available to help the Chinese. Advisers also furnished technical assistance to the Chinese in handling artillery and communications, and American military medical personnel worked with Chinese medics, nurses, and doctors who generally lacked formal training. Each advisory team also had an air-ground liaison section, operating its own radio net to provide air support. At the unit level, the American advisers accompanied Chinese forces in the field, supervising local training as best they could and working with Chinese commanders on plans and tactical operations. In no case were Americans in command, and their influence depended primarily on their own expertise and the willingness of Chinese commanders to accept foreign advice. And, not surprisingly, in those Nationalist units which Chiang hoped to conserve for his expected postwar struggle against the Red army, operations against the Japanese were not pursued with great vigor.

Training, American officers believed, was the key to success. While the Chinese divisions received unit training from personnel of the Chinese Combat Command, U.S. troops assigned to the Chinese Training Center, under the command of Brig. Gen. John W. Middleton, trained individual soldiers and, in some cases, cadres of special units. Training Center members established and then operated service



American soldiers attached to a Chinese division send a message from the field. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

schools, prepared and distributed training literature, and gave technical assistance to those assigned to the Chinese Combat Command. Ultimately, General Middleton operated seven service schools and training centers, the majority located near Kunming. Of those, the Field Artillery Training Center was the largest and, at its peak some one thousand Americans were instructing about ten thousand Chinese in the use of American-supplied artillery.

In addition, the China theater operated a command and general staff school and a Chinese army war college; training centers for infantry, heavy mortar, ordnance, and signal troops; and an interpreters' pool to teach English to the large number of Chinese serving as interpreters for the American advisers. Although the Americans wanted as many of the Chinese senior officers as possible exposed to the China Training Center coursework, only a small percentage of those officers actually attended the schools.

U.S. advisers also helped establish a Chinese services of supply (SOS) logistical organization to support the ALPHA Force. Emphasizing the movement of supplies from rear to front, it sought to supplant the traditional Chinese practice of cash payments and foraging. Of the approximately 300 Americans serving in the Chinese SOS headquarters, 147 officers and enlisted men worked in the Food Department, 84 served in the Quartermaster Section, and the rest were divided among ordnance, medical, transportation, communications, and other staff departments. In the field, 231 Americans manned a Chinese driver training school, and another 120 worked with various Chinese service elements. In a departure from standard practice, Chiang gave the American SOS commander, General Cheves, the rank of lieutenant general in the Chinese army and command of the Chinese SOS for the ALPHA divisions.

The ALPHA Force, concentrated around Kunming and commanded by General Ho Ying-chin, the former chief of staff of the Chinese army, gradually began to take shape. Wedemeyer hoped that U.S. assistance would transform its thirty-six divisions into a force capable of seizing the initiative from the Japanese in China. He believed that each one of the U.S.-sponsored divisions, with ten thousand men and its organic artillery battalion, would be more than sufficient to defeat a Japanese regiment.

Ultimately, Wedemeyer hoped to lay the groundwork for a Chinese offensive in the summer of 1945 that would recapture lost ground in the Liuchow-Nanning area east of Kunming and then drive on to capture a port in southeast China. At a minimum, such an offensive would tie down Japanese troops who might otherwise be sent back to defend

Japan against an Allied invasion. Once a port was captured, the increased flow of supplies would enable Chinese armies to undertake a general campaign to clear all Japanese forces from the Asian mainland. Wedemeyer's plan, code-named Operation BETA, seemed especially desirable in early 1945, when some American strategists expected that the Japanese, even with their home islands overrun, might make a final stand in China and Manchuria.

On 14 February 1945, General Wedemeyer submitted his plan for the Chinese offensive to Chiang Kai-shek, who immediately approved it. Wedemeyer's plan made a number of assumptions: the war in Europe would come to an end in May; operations in the Pacific would continue as planned, and would force the Japanese armies in China to redeploy to the north and east; a four-inch pipeline under construction from Burma would be completed by July; and the Hump and the land route to China through Burma, which opened in February, would together be able to deliver 60,000 tons of supplies per month. The plan had four phases: the capture of the Liuchow-Nanning area; the consolidation of the captured area; the concentration of forces needed for an advance to the Hong Kong-Canton coastal region; and an offensive operation to capture Hong Kong and Canton. The Joint Chiefs of Staff eventually approved the plan on 20 April, but by that time it had been overtaken by other events in the China theater.

In late January and early February, the *Imperial General Headquarters* in Tokyo revised its China policy. With the situation in the Pacific worsening, and with the increased possibility of both Japan and China being attacked from the sea, it ordered the *China Expeditionary Army* to focus on preventing an Allied invasion of China. Advance American air bases in China were to be destroyed, but other than that, only small forces would be permitted to launch raids into the interior. Instead, the Japanese command wanted to strengthen its forces in central and south China, particularly in the lower reaches of the Yangtze River between Shanghai and Hankow, about 450 miles to the west. To execute the new plan, General Okamura established three new divisions to reinforce the defenses along the coast of China. However, he also kept his remaining units concentrated in the interior. In late March, a renewed Japanese offensive began with the *China Expeditionary Army* attacking westward on a broad front between the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, with the objective of capturing the American air bases at Laohokow, 350 miles northeast of Chungking, and at Ankang, some 100 miles west of Laohokow. On 8 April, Laohokow fell.

The Chinese Army, 85 percent of which fell outside the ALPHA Force, was unable to counter the Japanese advance in any meaningful

way. The heavily bureaucratic Nationalist government and army were simply too cumbersome to direct any effective and immediate military response. In the absence of coherent Chinese planning, Wedemeyer and his staff filled the gap. U.S. planners believed that Okamura would next move either toward the American air base at Chihchiang, 270 miles southeast of Chungking, or continue the push westward beyond Laohokow. General Wedemeyer thought the drive to Chihchiang more likely and planned accordingly. He immediately took a series of defensive measures aimed at preparing the American-sponsored units for quick action and ordered the Fourteenth Air Force to continue bombing attacks on enemy communications lines. If the Japanese could be delayed now, Wedemeyer hoped that beginning about 1 May a powerful Chinese-American offensive could sweep them back toward the coast.

Operations

On 13 April, while the Chinese and American forces regrouped for combat, the Japanese began the expected offensive aimed at the Chihchiang air base, site of the Fourteenth Air Force's largest forward base south of the Yangtze. Its capture would lay open the approaches to Kunming, 500 miles to the west, and Chungking. In addition to destroying the air base, Okamura, ignoring the orders from *Imperial General Headquarters*, hoped to recapture the initiative in China by defeating the main body of the Chinese forces in the area southeast of Chungking.

Okamura deployed approximately 60,000 troops for the new offensive against about 100,000 Chinese defenders. Previously, China's numerical advantage had been offset by the superior equipment and training of the Japanese. Such was still the case. The Chinese units of the ALPHA Force were, in many respects, little better than those that had suffered defeats in the past. Lack of time had prevented the completion of the planned twenty-three weeks of training for combat divisions; not all had received American equipment, and those that had were still unfamiliar in its use.

Several changes were in place, however, which drastically affected the combat potential of the ALPHA Force. A vastly improved supply situation meant that not only was Chennault's Fourteenth Air Force now capable of sustained operations, but also that the Chinese would receive food and ammunition on a regular basis. An American advisory system, tied together by radio, which could pass along timely information of enemy movements and coordinate more effective responses, was present in most divisions. Perhaps of even greater importance, old

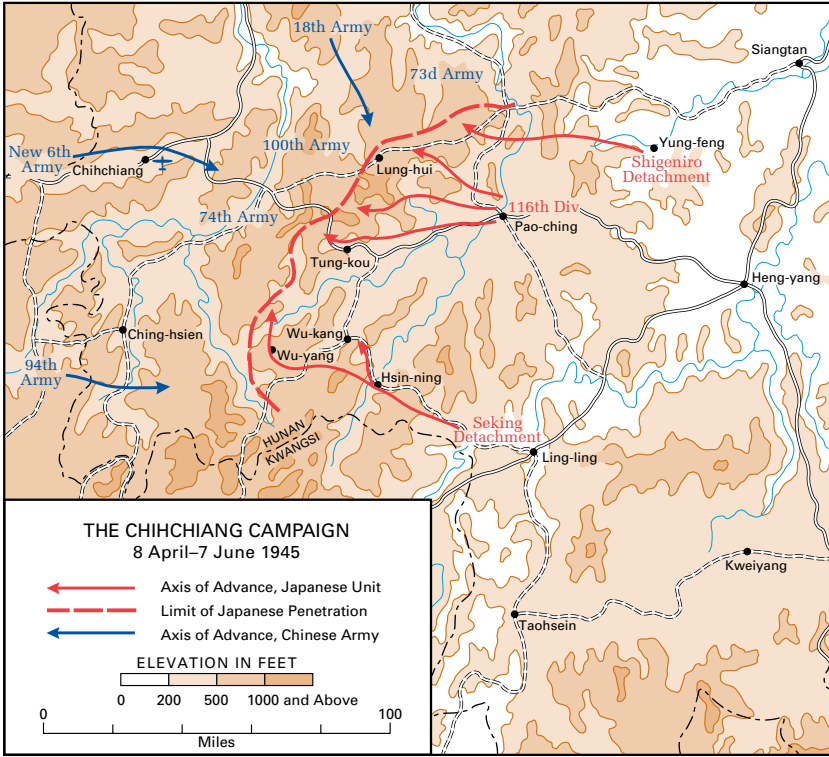


Chinese soldiers await removal to a field hospital for rehabilitation. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

attitudes of suspicion were being replaced by a new spirit of mutual cooperation between the Chinese and the Americans.

The Japanese drove directly against Chihchiang from the east while two smaller forces to the north and south moved generally parallel to the main column. The Chinese Combat Command's advisory and liaison system was immediately called into play. At a meeting on 14 April, the day after the Japanese general advance began, Generals Ho and McClure agreed on the basic plan to counter the enemy attack. Chinese armies would be concentrated to the north and south to prepare to strike the enemy advance in the flanks and rear. The Chinese center around Chihchiang would be strengthened by moving the new 6th Army, composed of two veteran divisions of the Burma campaign, into the area. When Chiang Kai-shek attempted to become actively involved by issuing orders directly to General Ho, General Wedemeyer politely, but firmly, dissuaded him.

By late April, 6th Army forces began concentrating at Chihchiang. Although their deployment from Burma diverted scarce fuel from the



Fourteenth Air Force, American airmen continued to fly repeated missions against the attacking Japanese. Meanwhile, other Chinese armies moved into position, the 94th to the south and the 100th and 18th to the north. And, perhaps most heartening, the 74th Army, defending the Chinese center on a fifty-mile front, was putting up a stout resistance, slowing the Japanese advance.

On 3 May a Chinese-American staff conference decided to counterattack a Japanese detachment near Wu-yang, seventy miles southeast of Chihchiang. The subsequent engagement by the 5th Division of the 94th Army on 5 and 6 May was completely successful. Over the next few days, the 5th and 121st Divisions, also of the 94th Army, repeatedly outflanked the Japanese and hustled them north. American advisers commented on the aggressiveness of the Chinese commanders and the bravery of their men. Frequent airdrops of ammunition and food had raised their morale, while the Chinese commanders had reportedly sought the advice of the American liaison officers before

making decisions. To the north, the Chinese 18th and 100th Armies moved into the Japanese rear. With the 94th Army threatening from the south, the Japanese were forced into a general retreat and by 7 June were back at their initial starting positions. From the beginning of the enemy advance in early April until its end in June, the Japanese suffered 1,500 killed and 5,000 wounded. Chinese casualties were at least 6,800 killed and 11,200 wounded, but for the first time the Chinese losses were not in vain.

The Chihchiang campaign demonstrated that Chinese troops could successfully face the Japanese if they had sufficient numerical strength, coordinated their movements and actions, and received a steady supply of food and ammunition. By aggressive maneuvering, the Chinese had outflanked a determined foe and forced its retreat. Wedemeyer's ALPHA Force, whatever its shortcomings, had proved its worth.

In mid-April the *Japanese Imperial General Headquarters* had more immediate matters to reflect on. American troops had landed on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, which could provide staging bases for attacks on Japan itself. Subsequently, Tokyo ordered the *Kwangtung Army* in Manchuria to transfer one-third of its ammunition and some of its best troops to the home islands. Tokyo also issued warning orders to the *China Expeditionary Army* to prepare to concentrate its forces in the Yangtze River valley between Shanghai and Hankow; around the main ports of China, such as Shanghai and Canton; and across northern China, joining with the remaining units of the Manchurian *Kwangtung Army*. Okamura was to be reinforced with newly mobilized units from Japan, bringing his total troop strength by the summer of 1945 to over a million men south of the Great Wall, although the quality was less than before. The redeployment in China would guard against anticipated American amphibious landings along the coast and a Soviet attack from the north. The Japanese leaders hoped to deny the Allies staging areas from which they could attack Japan and to protect Chinese mines and factories, which could still supply Japan's military forces.

Thus, when the Japanese drive on Chihchiang was blunted and pushed back, reinforcements were not rushed to the area to retrieve the situation, as the local commander demanded. Instead, the Japanese prepared for further withdrawals. In mid-May, as the situation on Okinawa deteriorated, *Imperial General Headquarters* ordered the evacuation of the southern rail line extending to Kweilin and Liuchow, a branch of the main Hankow-Canton railway. Thus, within a few days of the end of the Chihchiang campaign, General Okamura had begun to move units from south China and redeploy them into northern and central China.

As the Japanese forces started pulling back, General Wedemeyer and China theater planners began studies on how best to exploit the withdrawal. Reviving the BETA plan for an advance to the coast to capture the ports of Canton and Hong Kong seemed a good possibility. With U.S. forces now established in the Philippines, supplies could quickly be brought to China from Manila. Furthermore, the evacuation of the air bases in the Kweilin-Liuchow area, about 270 miles west of Canton, which was expected to occur soon, would help solve the logistical problems of supporting the offensive. Supplies then could be flown directly from India or the Philippines to east China.

The revised plan, renamed CARBONADO, called for a rapid advance to the coast in August to seize Fort Bayard on the Liuchow Peninsula, about 250 miles southwest of Canton. Once a forward supply base had been established at Fort Bayard, Wedemeyer believed that the main CARBONADO attack could begin on 1 September from the Kweilin-Liuchow area with a final assault on Canton on 1 November. Additional combat aircraft arrived in China to prepare for and support CARBONADO. The U.S. Tenth Air Force from India joined the Fourteenth Air Force on 23 July to form the Army Air Forces, China theater, under the command of Lt. Gen. George E. Stratemeyer. Logistical support was another matter, and it proved to be no less troublesome than previously.

As the Chinese followed the retreating Japanese, it quickly became apparent that, while aerial resupply could provide ammunition, it could not feed entire Chinese armies. Parts of the countryside contained no food, and a ground line of supply had to be established to move food supplies forward. To organize an effective logistical system for a sustained offensive, preparations had to be made all the way from India to Kunming. To make matters even more difficult, operations over the land route through Burma proceeded under monsoon conditions from late May until the end of the summer. Despite these problems, the troops of General Sultan, the commander of the India-Burma theater, provided steadily increasing support for the China effort. With combat operations in Burma drawing down, Sultan's command became, in effect, the support agency for Wedemeyer.

The Chinese armies slowly moved forward into the vacuum left by the retreating Japanese. Northeast of Chungking, the Chinese armies skirmished with the Japanese in June and July and then withdrew to reorganize when it became apparent that the new Japanese defensive line was strongly held. In central and south China, more minor fighting occurred, but the Japanese troop movements into northern and central China were largely unopposed, at least initially. Along the coast between Shanghai and Canton, Nationalist Chinese forces moved into



The Chinese return to Liuchow in July 1945. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

Fukien Province, seizing the port of Foochow in May. Despite this success, the Japanese tightened their grip on Shanghai and also south of Foochow, on Canton, by reinforcing the garrisons of the two ports with troops withdrawn from Fukien and by sending additional troops to the Swatow and Amoy coastal areas between the Canton–Hong Kong area and Foochow. Although the Japanese hoped to reserve their main strength for a defensive struggle in the north, they meant to conduct a strong rearguard action against any Allied attempts to seize the southern coast from either the land or the sea.

On 26 June Chinese forces recaptured the airfield at Liuchow, but sharp fighting ensued as the Chinese attempted to cut the Japanese line of withdrawal near Kweilin, on the railway about one hundred miles north of Liuchow. By the end of July, the Chinese had concentrated sufficient troops in the area for an attack, but the Japanese, the bulk of whom had cleared the area moving north, relinquished the city. As August began, the Japanese had almost completed their redeployment into the areas they intended to defend to the last.

Planning for the capture of Fort Bayard proceeded while the Chinese followed up the retreating Japanese. At a conference on the island of Guam on 6 August, representatives of the China and the Pacific theaters met to make final arrangements for the seizure of the area. At the time, Allied analysts estimated that the Japanese had over 14,000 troops in the area, but in fact there were less than 2,000, and even those were in the process of withdrawing toward Canton. Nevertheless, a sharp action occurred on 3 August, about twenty miles west of Fort Bayard as the Chinese drew near. That and poor weather, which limited aerial resupply, held the Nationalist troops short of the coast.

On 6 August 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, and three days later a second bomb on Nagasaki. That same day, 9 August, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan with three Soviet army groups invading Manchuria from the east, north, and west. With Japanese defenses crumbling in Manchuria and the end of the war imminent, Wedemeyer suspended the planned capture of Fort Bayard. On 14 August, the Japanese government accepted the terms of the Allied demand for unconditional surrender.

Although warned by General Wedemeyer in July of the problems that would result from a sudden surrender of the Japanese, Chiang Kai-shek and his government were unprepared for the abrupt collapse. Wedemeyer had alerted Washington to the impending crisis. Recognizing that the U.S.-sponsored divisions of the ALPHA Force still represented only a small percentage of the huge but unwieldy Nationalist Chinese army, he judged that Chiang's government could not withstand an open civil war against the Communists. Nevertheless, U.S. leaders were understandably reluctant to become directly involved in a new war, although U.S. Army and Marine Corps troops soon arrived in China to receive the surrender of the Japanese garrisons there. Meanwhile, on 22 August, the China Theater suspended all training under American supervision, an action that marked the beginning of the end for the elaborate system of American liaison, air and logistical support, and advice. The armies of Chiang Kai-shek would soon be on their own.

Moreover, diplomatic problems erupted between the Allies over issues of control in China. As President Harry S. Truman issued the cease-fire message to all Allied commands on 15 August, Marshall Joseph Stalin's Soviet troops established themselves in Manchuria and sent an advance force to within thirty miles of the ancient Chinese capital of Peiping. With the first rumors of peace, British vessels in the



Allied victory drive along Nanking Road in Shanghai. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

Pacific sought release from the Allied Pacific Fleet so as to reestablish British control over Hong Kong, while remnants of the French troops who had retreated into China prepared to march back into Indo-China. Simultaneously, Mao Tse-tung, no friend of either Chiang or Stalin, sent his Red army troops scrambling for open control of northern and central China, areas where Red army guerrilla units had already established a solid presence.

The war with Japan finally came to an end in September 1945. Following the 2 September official capitulation to the Allies on board the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, another ceremony was held on 9 September in Nanking. Here, on the site of the famous "Rape of Nanking," General Okamura formally surrendered Japan's forces in China. But, for China, Japan's defeat merely signaled the resumption of the civil war between China's Nationalists and the Communists for control of the entire country, a contest that, ulti-



At a banquet to honor General Chennault are, from left facing: Ambassador Hurley, Generalissimo Chang, General Chennault. General Wedemeyer is in profile at extreme right. (U.S. Army Military History Institute)

mately, neither the Soviet Union nor the western Allies could influence in any appreciable manner.

Analysis

When General Wedemeyer arrived in China at the end of 1944, he faced a still-powerful and intact Japanese ground army. Although Allied leaders lacked sufficient resources to drive the Japanese entirely out of China, they hoped that a Nationalist Chinese army, trained and equipped by the United States, could succeed in tying down Japanese armies in China and prevent their redeployment to Japan.

By the force of his personality and by his determination, Wedemeyer convinced Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of the need not only to permit United States military advisers to train and equip Chinese divisions, but also to create a more effective command and control organization. Once Chiang Kai-shek had granted that authority to General Wedemeyer, the Army liaison officers and technicians

serving in the China theater, building on the foundation erected by General Stilwell, clearly created a more capable Chinese military force. But critical to their effort was the fighting that reopened the land supply route through Burma and the hard work of U.S. aviators, flying supplies over the Hump and providing direct support to the Chinese forces in the field.

The success of Wedemeyer's reforms, and of the revitalized Chinese military forces, was seen in the failure of the Japanese Chihchiang offensive. If the war had dragged on in China, the Japanese would have had a more difficult task in dealing with the new Chinese armies. However, there is no doubt that the American victory over Japan was the product of a host of earlier battles in the Pacific. The China theater remained at the end of the war, as it had since the attack on Pearl Harbor, a sideshow, one whose fate was ultimately determined by battles fought elsewhere.

The American advisory effort in China not only aided the Allied military effort, but also reinforced traditional United States interests in China. From the beginning of the war, President Roosevelt wanted to bolster Chiang and the Nationalist government to serve as a counterpoint against a potentially resurgent Japan. The President saw postwar China as a major power and partner, protecting U.S. economic, diplomatic, and strategic interests in Asia. Although the United States subsequently provided massive amounts of economic and military aid to Chiang Kai-shek, that assistance failed to create an effective, pro-Western government or military force. Within four years of the war's end, Mao Tse-tung and his Communist forces overran China, forcing Chiang and his Nationalist supporters to flee to the island of Formosa and providing the last act in a drama that had begun forty years earlier.

CHINA OFFENSIVE 1945

Further Readings

Those who wish to study the China Offensive Campaign in more detail should first turn to Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland, *Time Runs Out in CBI* (1959), a volume in the U.S. Army in World War II series, produced by the U.S. Army Center of Military History. The air side of the campaign is covered in Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cates, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (1950) and in the United States Strategic Bombing Survey, *Air Operations in China, Burma, India*, vol. 67 (1947). For the British perspective see Maj. Gen. S. Woodborn Kirby, *Surrender of Japan*, vol. 5 in the series *The War Against Japan* (1969). Wedemeyer tells his story in General Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* (1958). A discussion of General Chennault and his influence on the situation in China is found in Boyd H. Bauer, "General Claire Lee Chennault and China, 1937–1958: A Study of Chennault, His Relationship with China, and Selected Issues in Sino-American Relations" (1973), a Ph.D. dissertation from American University. Coverage of the events in China is also given in John H. Boyle, *China and Japan at War, 1937–1945* (1972) and in Frederick F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China, 1924–1949* (1956).

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Cover: *Chinese mechanics reassemble a lend-lease jeep under the direction of an American liaison soldier.*
(U.S. Army Military History Institute)