

What we did not know about the Defence of Burma in 1942 The Burma Railways under Fire

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What I won't discuss today--The 'Other' Burma Railway

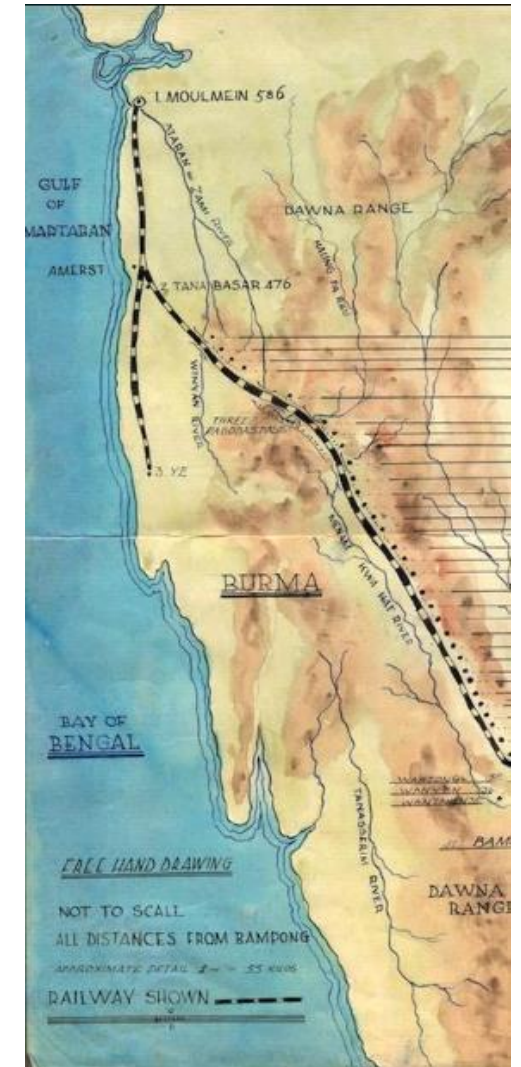
Japanese Thai-Burma Railway

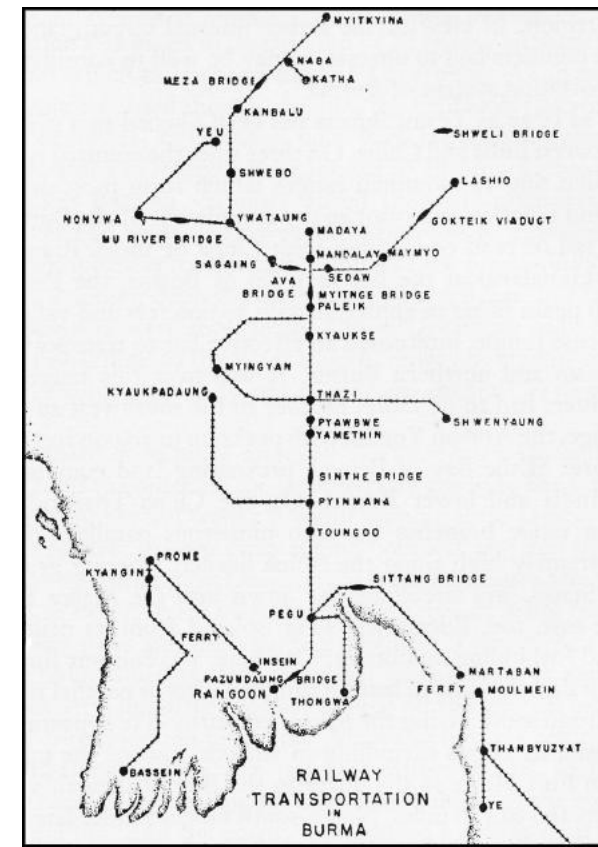
Finished 1943

Links up Gulf of Siam with Burma Railways

Built with Asian and POW labour

Gets the lion's share of attention regarding CBI





The Colonial Railway

Historical Context: The Japanese Advance in SEA 1941 and attack on Burma 1942



Historiography on the Japanese invasion of Burma—main points of emphasis (1) Sittang Bridge



(2) Fall of Rangoon, 7/8 March 1942

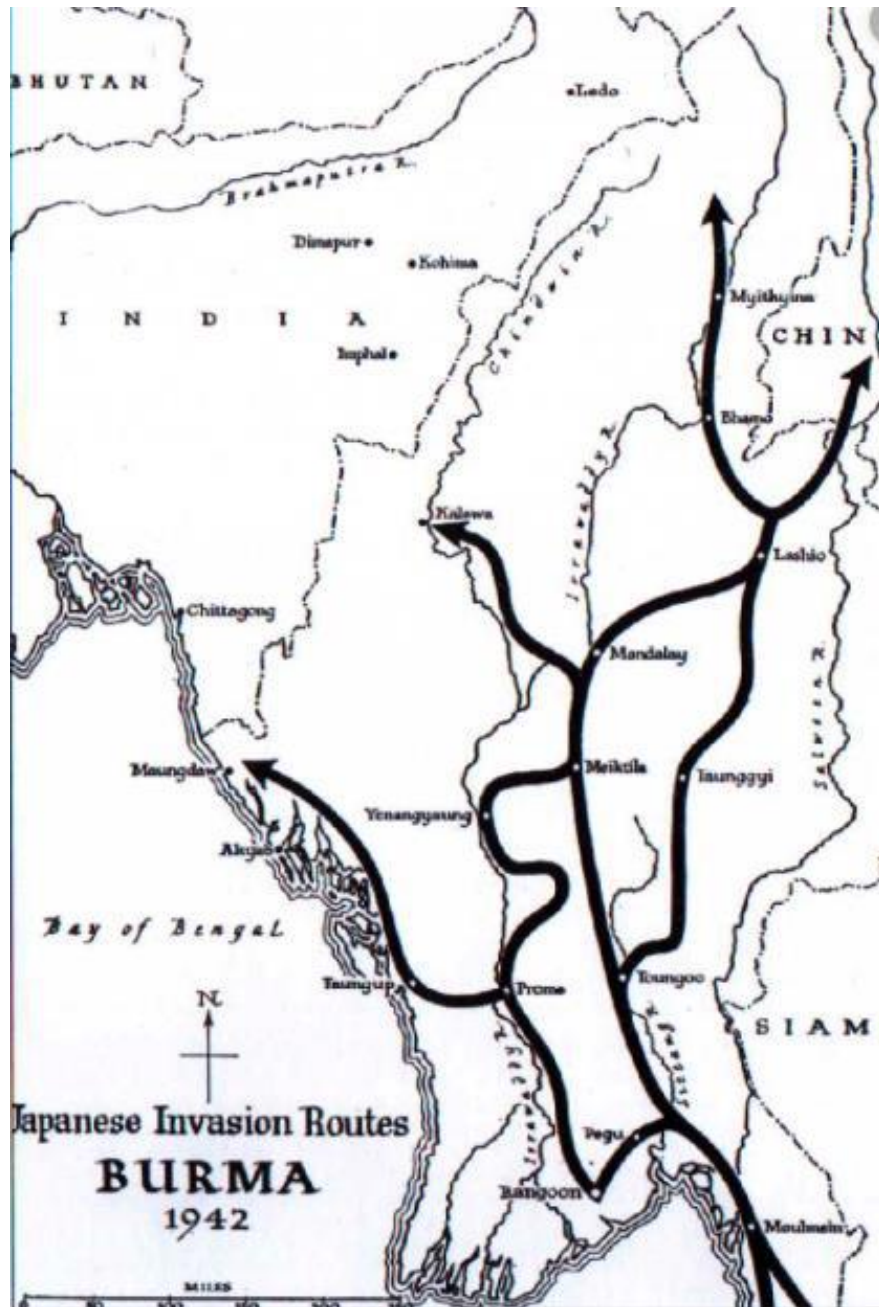


(3) Defense of the Yenangyaung Oil Fields

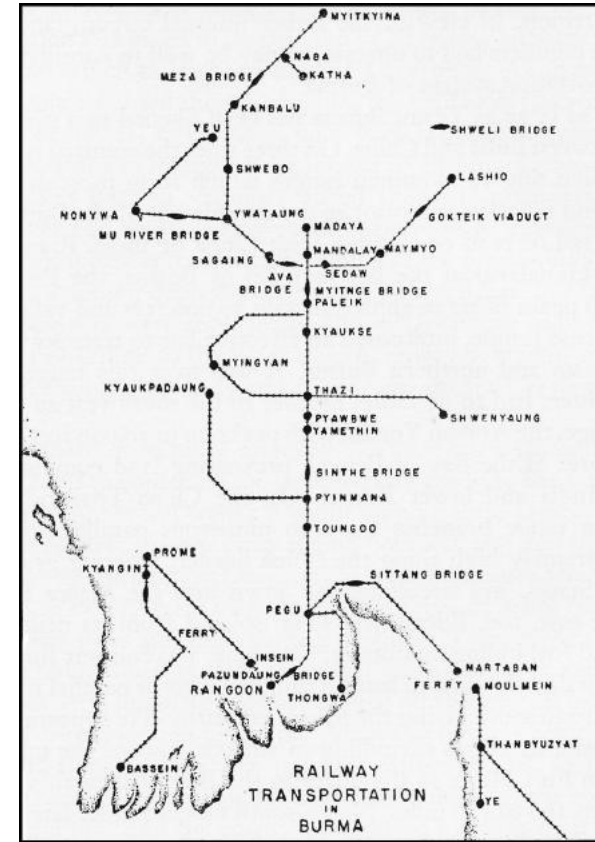
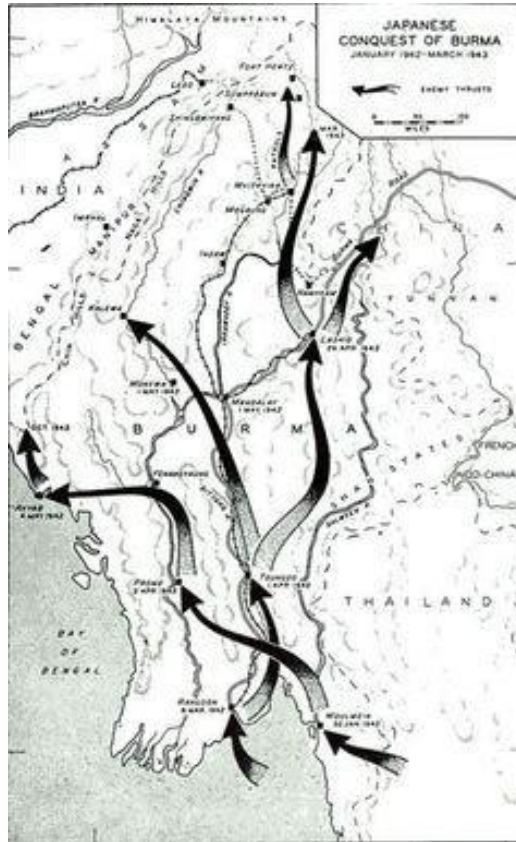




Exodus out – over the mountains into Assam in
May-June 1942



What's there and what's not



The Critical Overlap: Maps of Burma in 1942 Japanese invasion routes (L) and railway lines (R)

Conventional Sources

Imperial Military Transportation in British Asia

Burma 1941–1942

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BLOOMSBURY

Burma Railways Personnel reports (IOR)

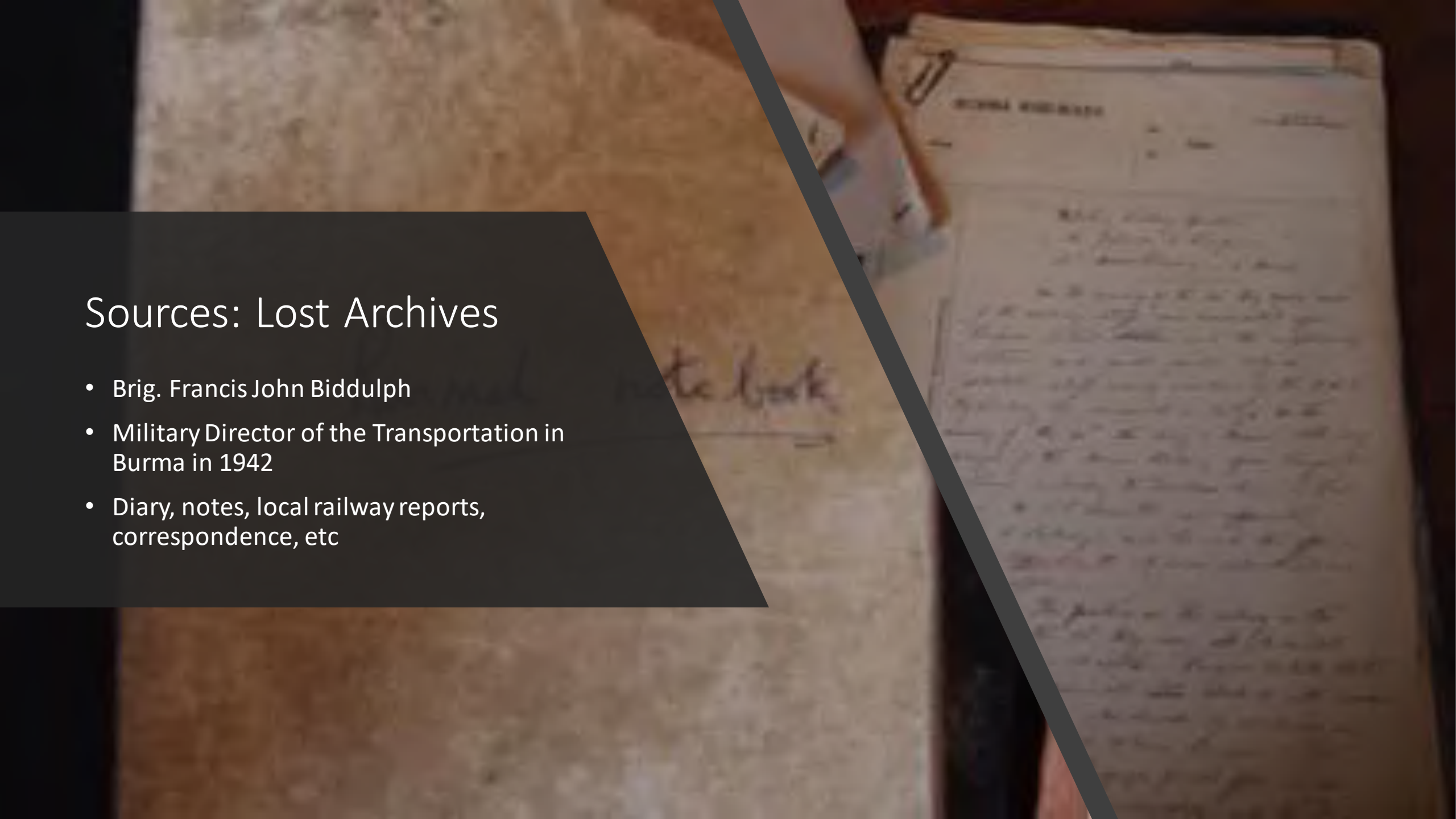
Biddulph's technical report

Physical remains

Royal engineer Major Roy Hudson war diary for Malerkotla engineers

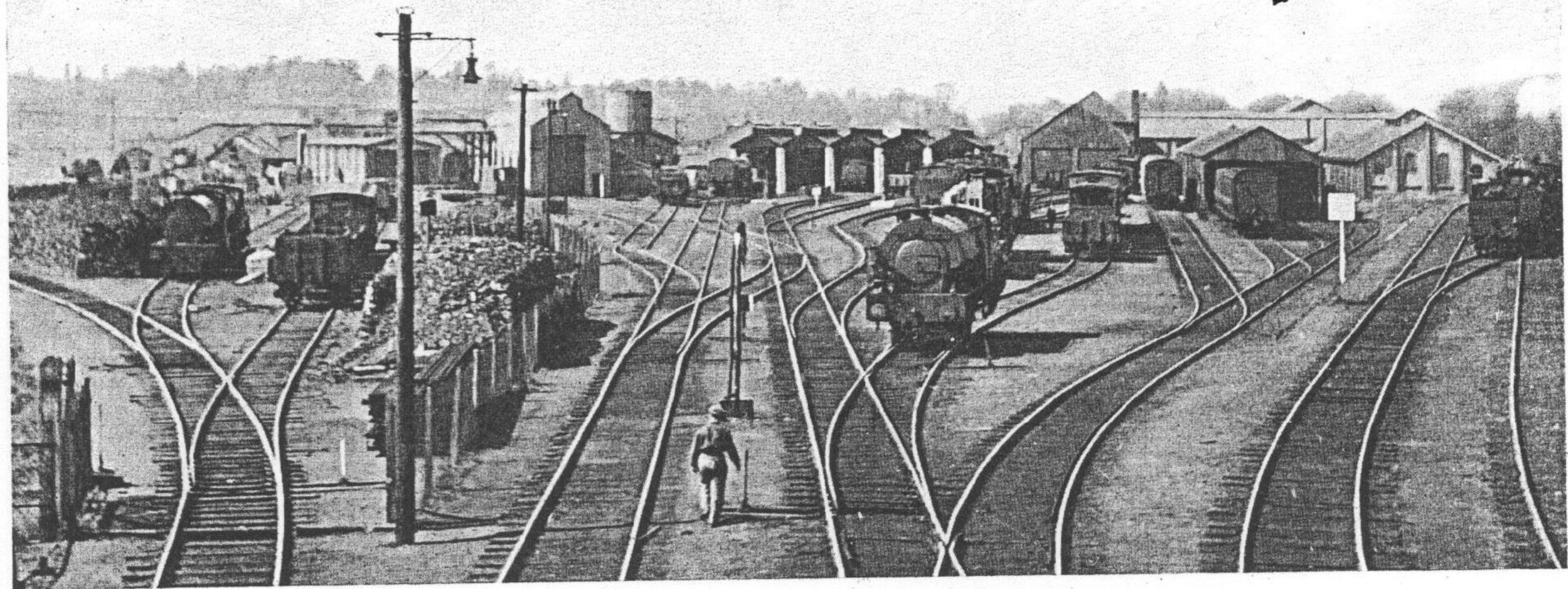


Sources: Last survivor:
Major Roy Hudson

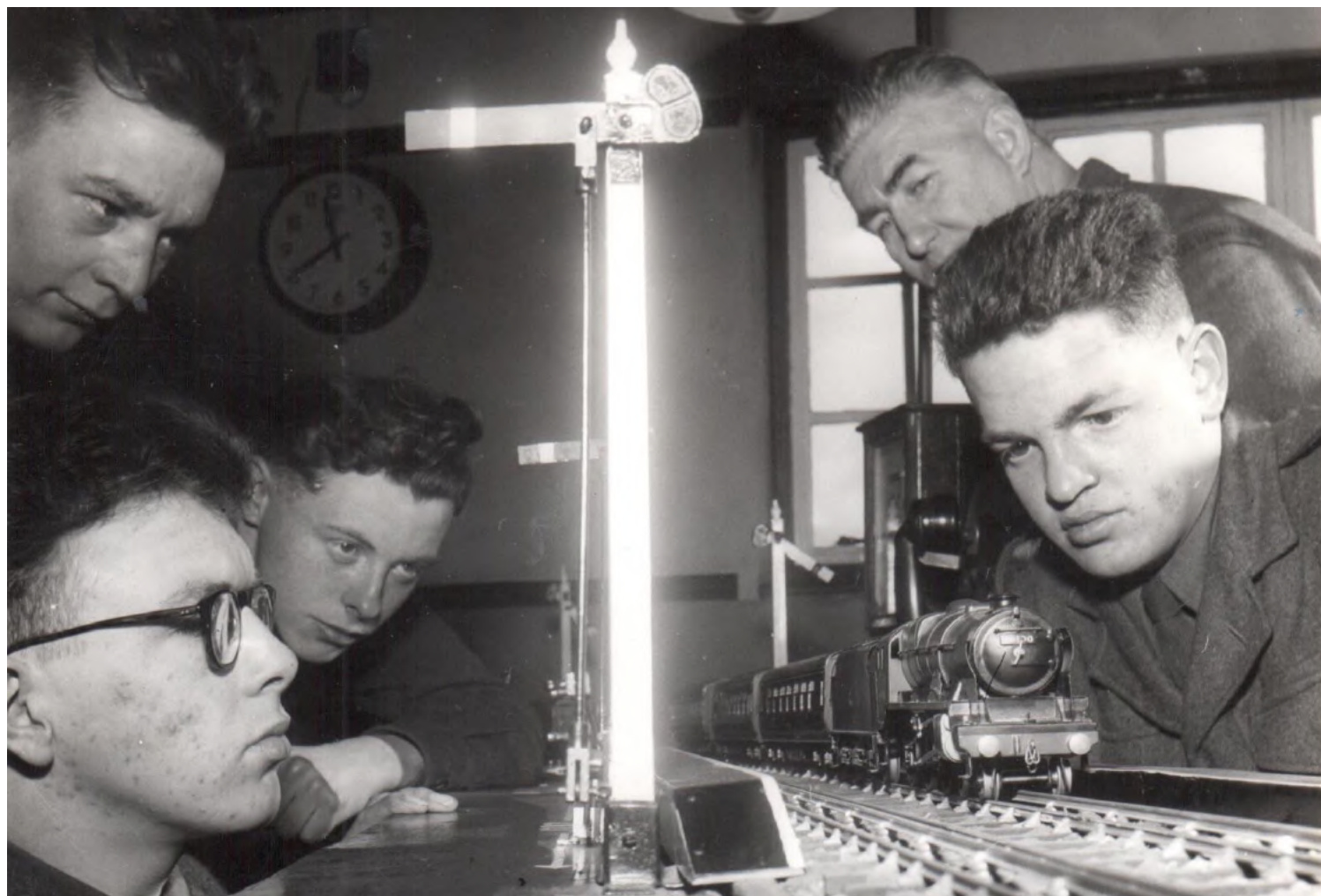


Sources: Lost Archives

- Brig. Francis John Biddulph
- Military Director of the Transportation in Burma in 1942
- Diary, notes, local railway reports, correspondence, etc



Longmoor (railway training centre)

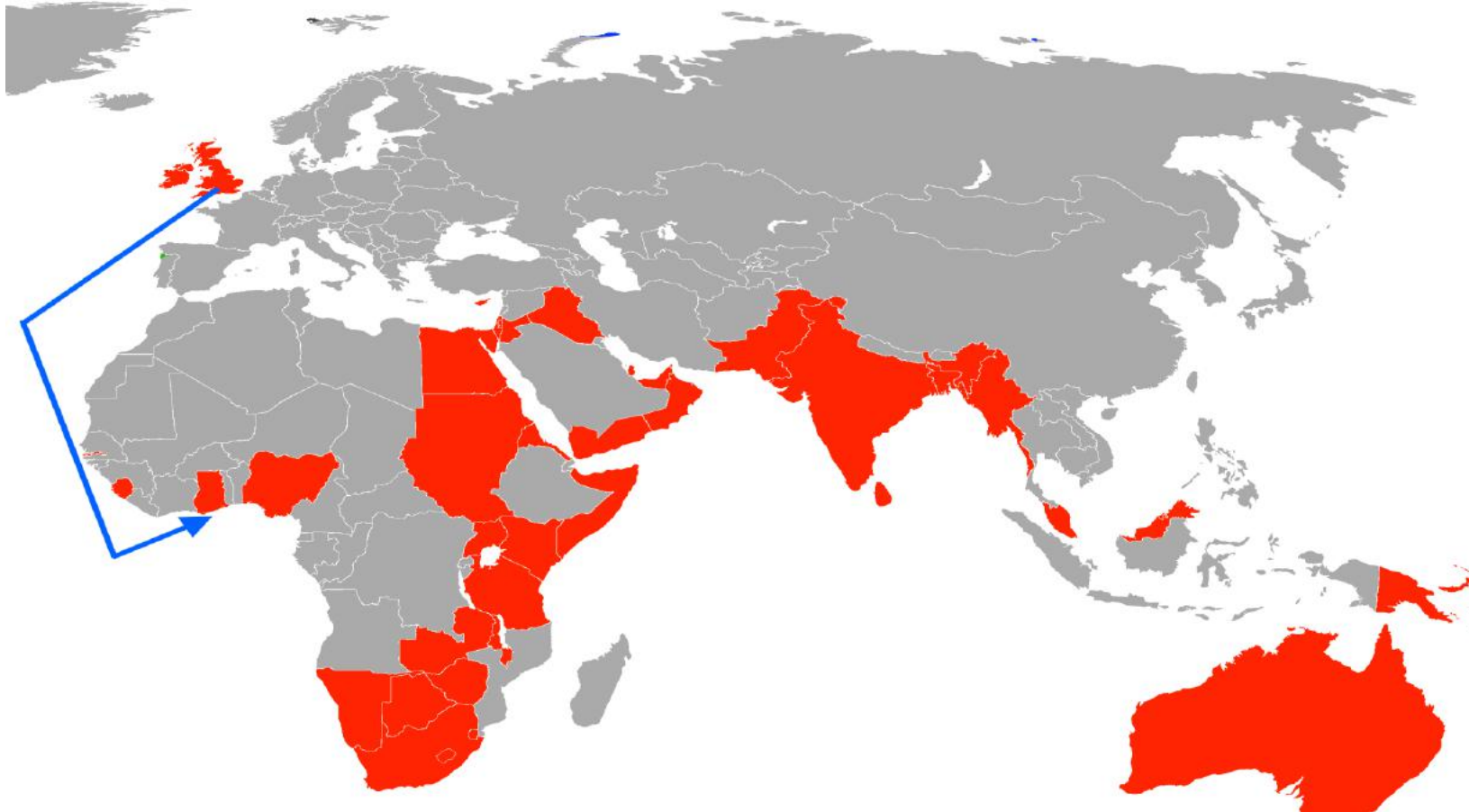


Longmoor
(railway
training
centre)

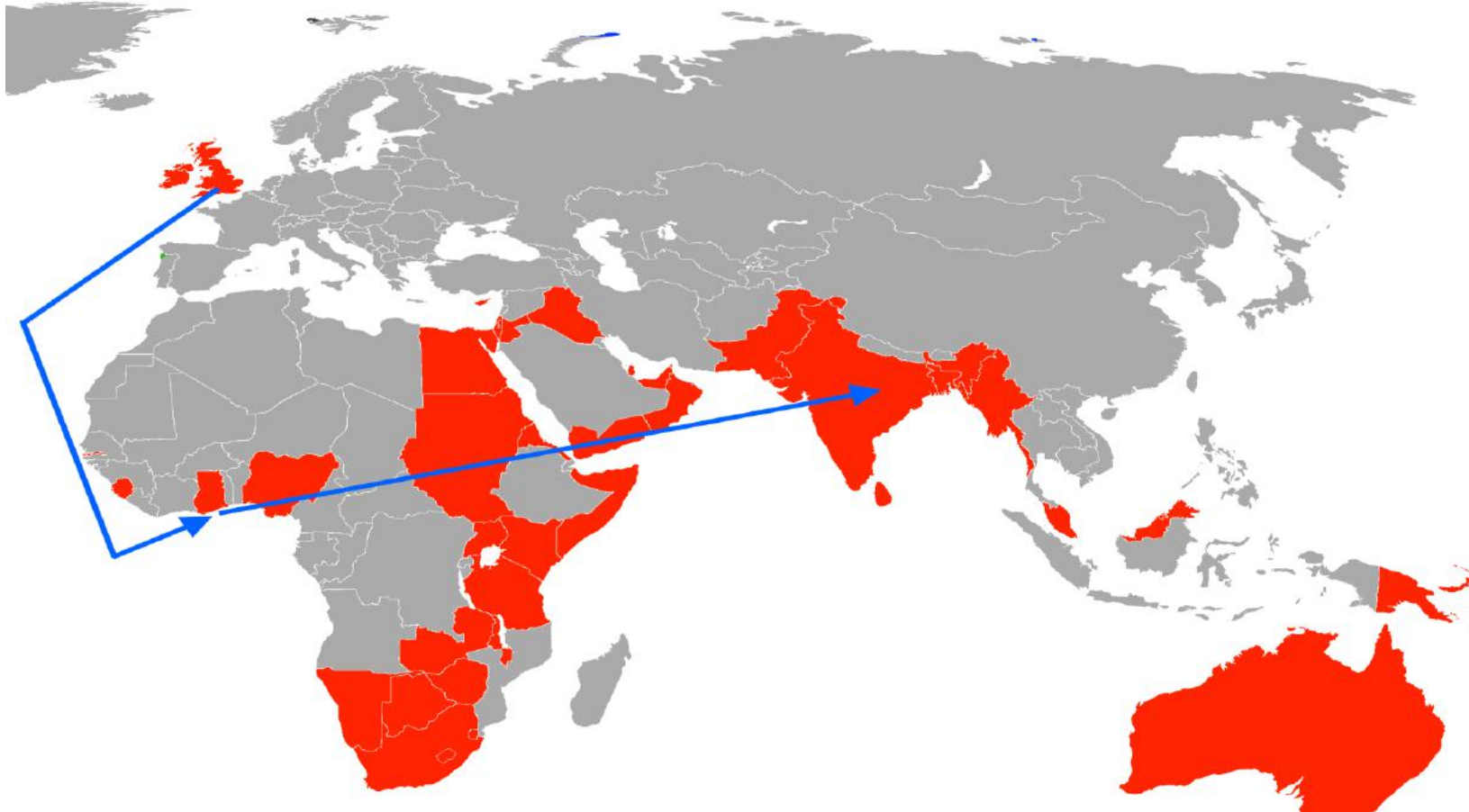
Longmoor (railway training centre)



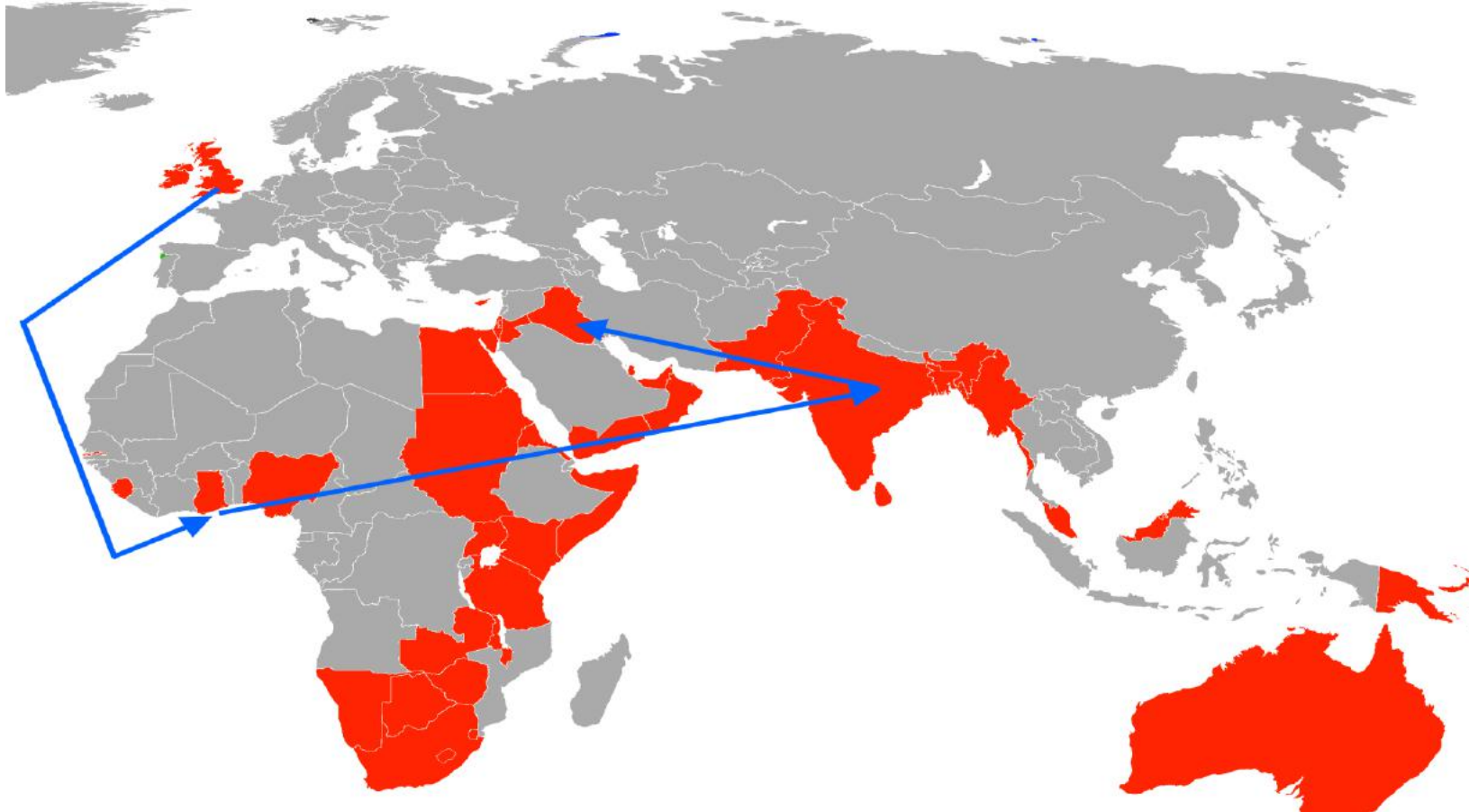
Longmoor Training across the Empire in 1941



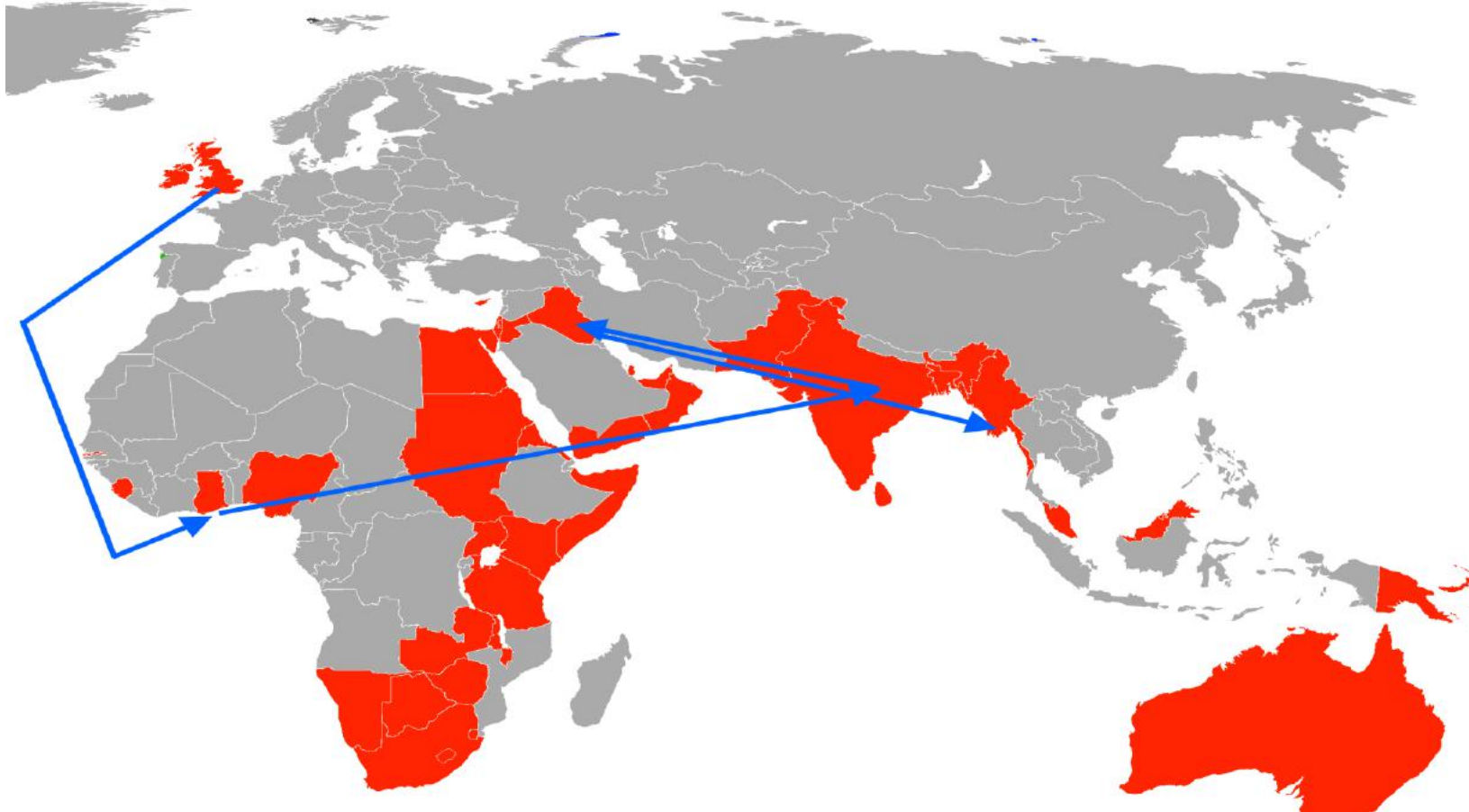
Longmoor Training across the Empire in 1941



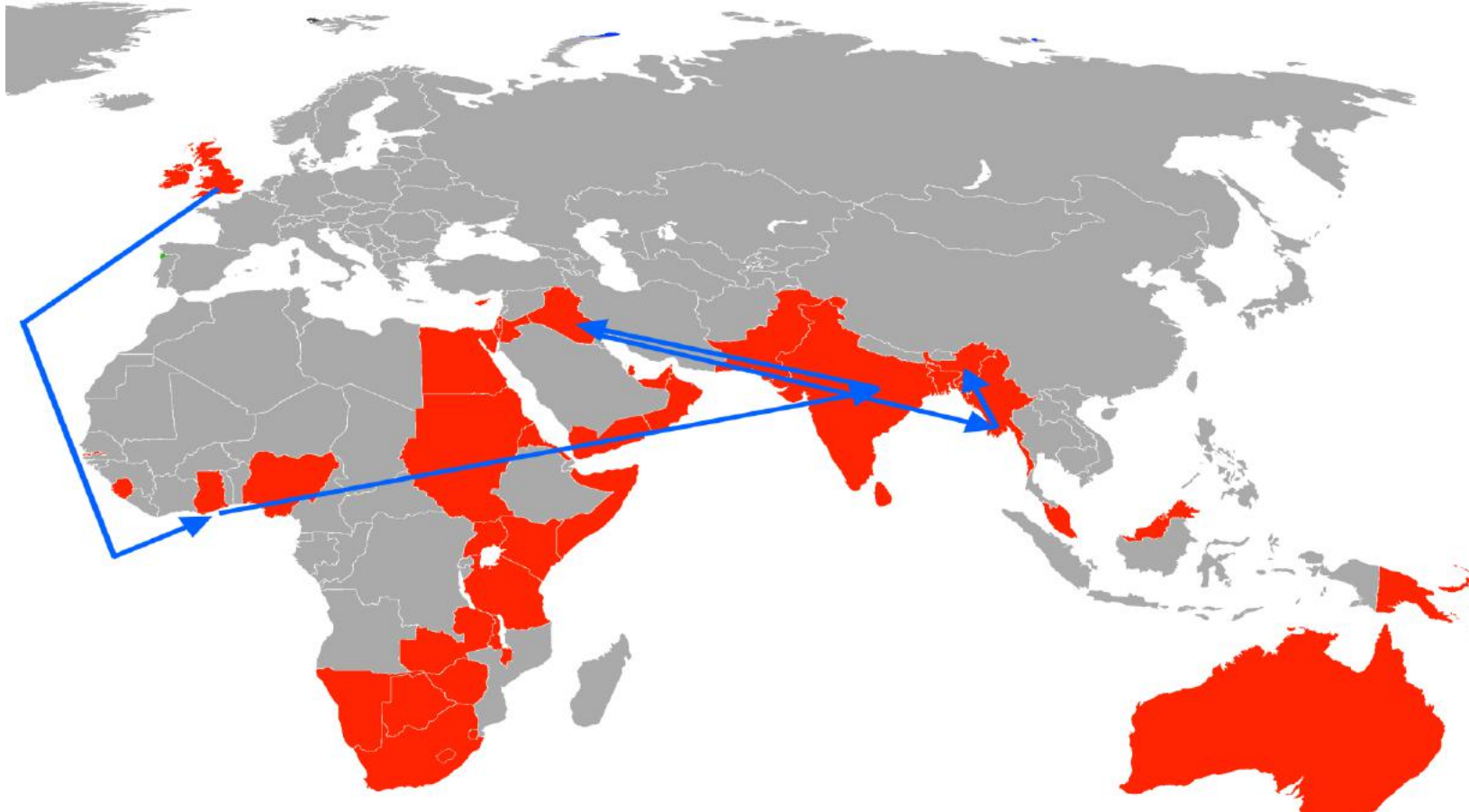
Longmoor Training across the Empire in 1941

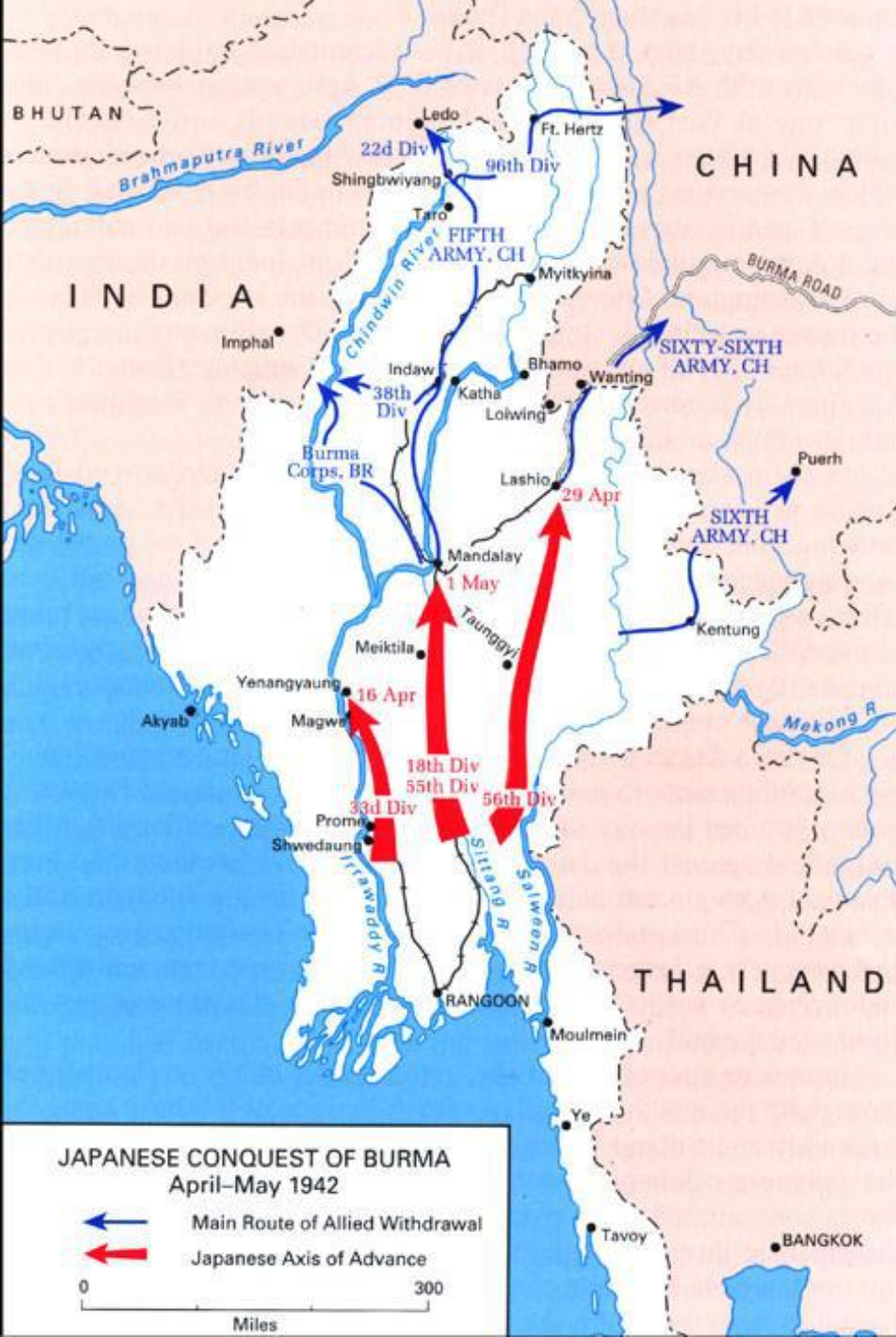


Longmoor Training across the Empire in 1941



Longmoor Training across the Empire in 1941





Railways in the First Burma Campaign (1941-1942)

- Military Transportation Directorate--external management and new transportation technique
- Until January 1942 colonial rejection
- Until late February 1942 resistance
- 24 February 1942 railway operations declared over
- Military control of railways declared
- Some colonial railwaymen sacked, others formed into core of military railway operating units in south
- April 1942 remaining railwaymen militarised
- 11/12 May 1942 railway operations finally cease

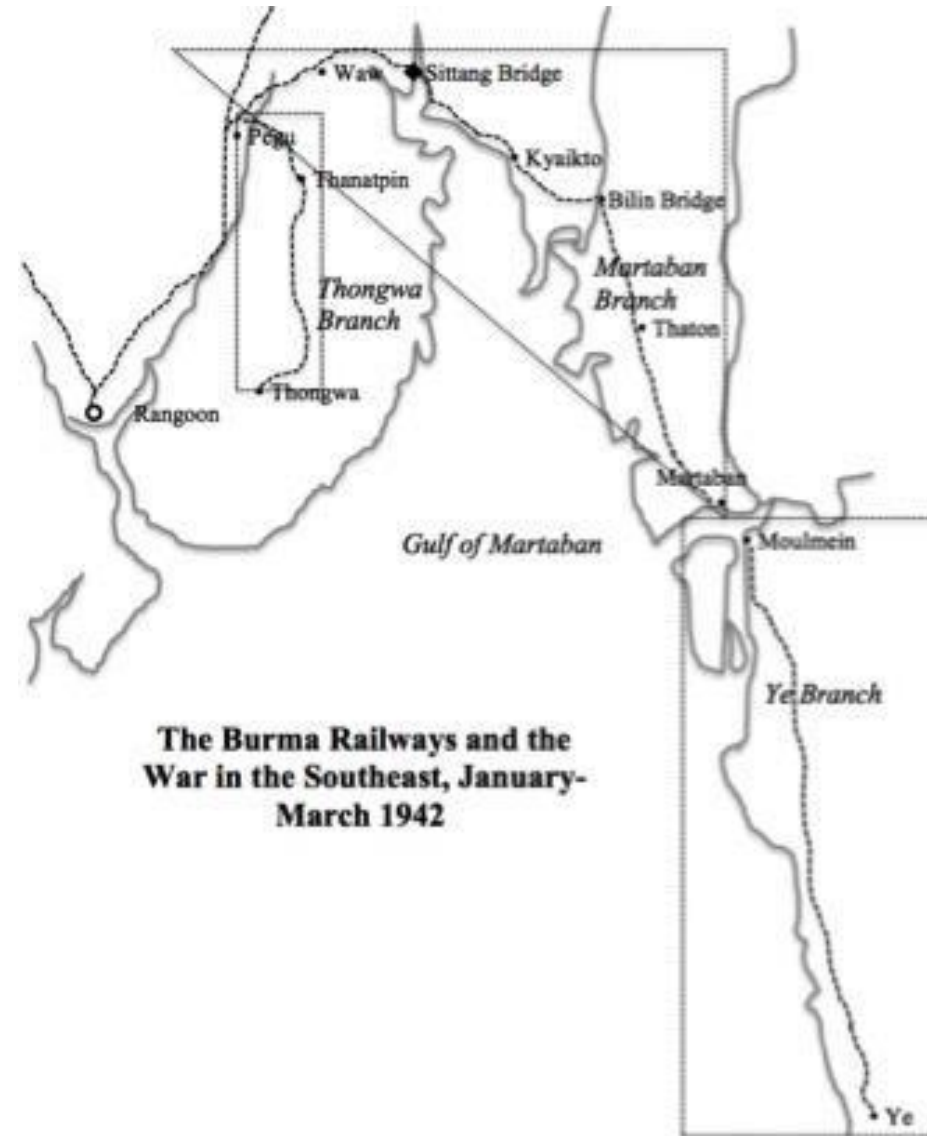
Main challenges to railway operations: Bad Pre-war planning and Shifting Demands

Prewar scenarios expected Japanese attack overland from Chiengmai

Lines of communications set up in northeast, but Japanese attack from Southeast

After invasion begins, railways have to move army and supplies south while moving civilian population north

With fall of Singapore on 16 February 1942, railways vulnerable and with loss of Rangoon on 7 March, railways mainly aid refugees and Chinese army



air attacks

Japanese bombing scare away rail labour early in campaign

--target vicinity of railway stations

--major labour flight twice

Rail works fall into disrepair—blamed on dacoity

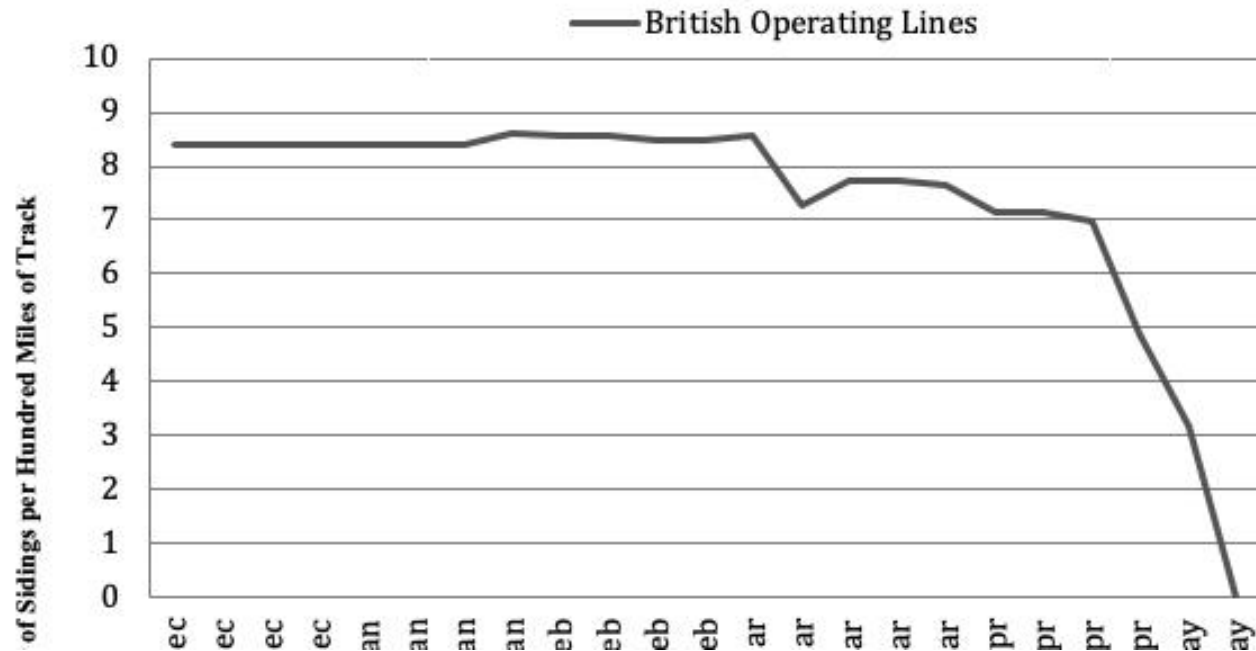
No air cover from March

--AVG and RAF in Burma knocked out of Rangoon then Magwe destroyed

Railway operations in colonial have no preparations in place for defending against air (later rig some AA up).



Ratio of the Number of Sidings to Railway Mileage on the Burma Railways during the First Burma Campaign



Challenges: Structural

Colonial railway layout bottom-heavy

Railway traffic moves north on shrinking rail capacity

Jammed lines due to few sidings

Remaining railway shop-workers and railwaymen demand they too be militarized and paid (they were also the heads of now refugee families but as civil workers were not entitled to military funds or rations)

Burma Railways in April 1942



Difficulty in international cooperation

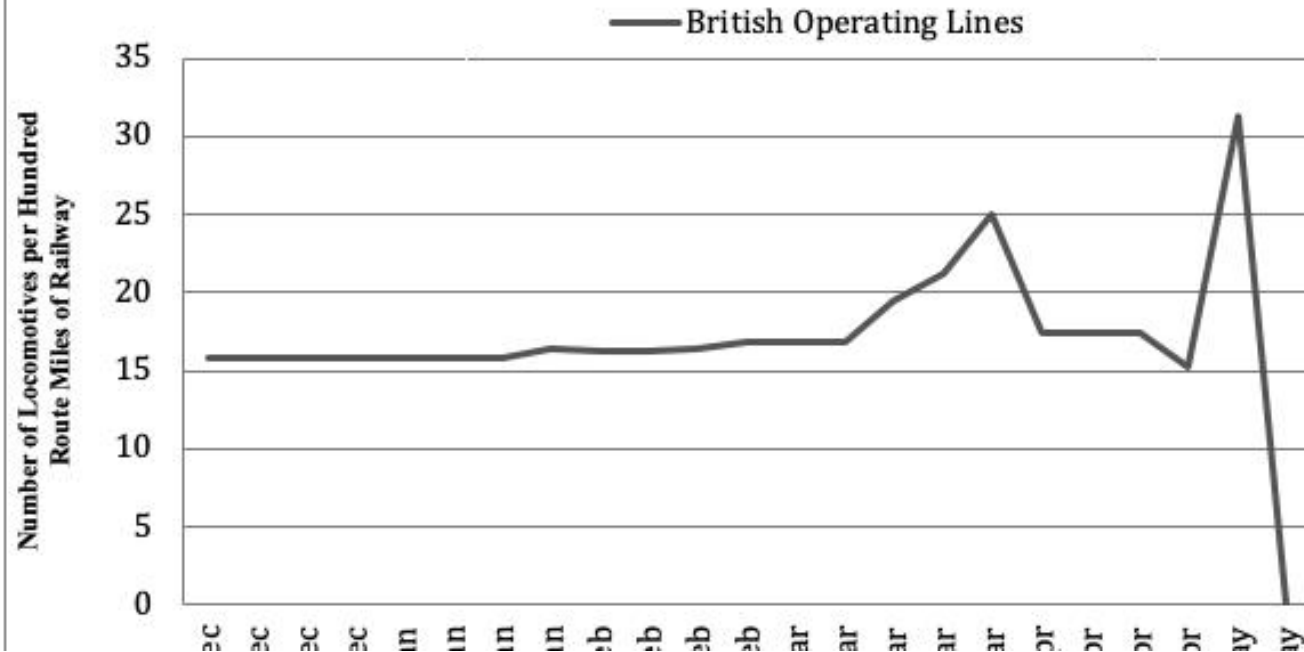
Pre-existing Anti-Chinese sentiments in Burma among colonial administration

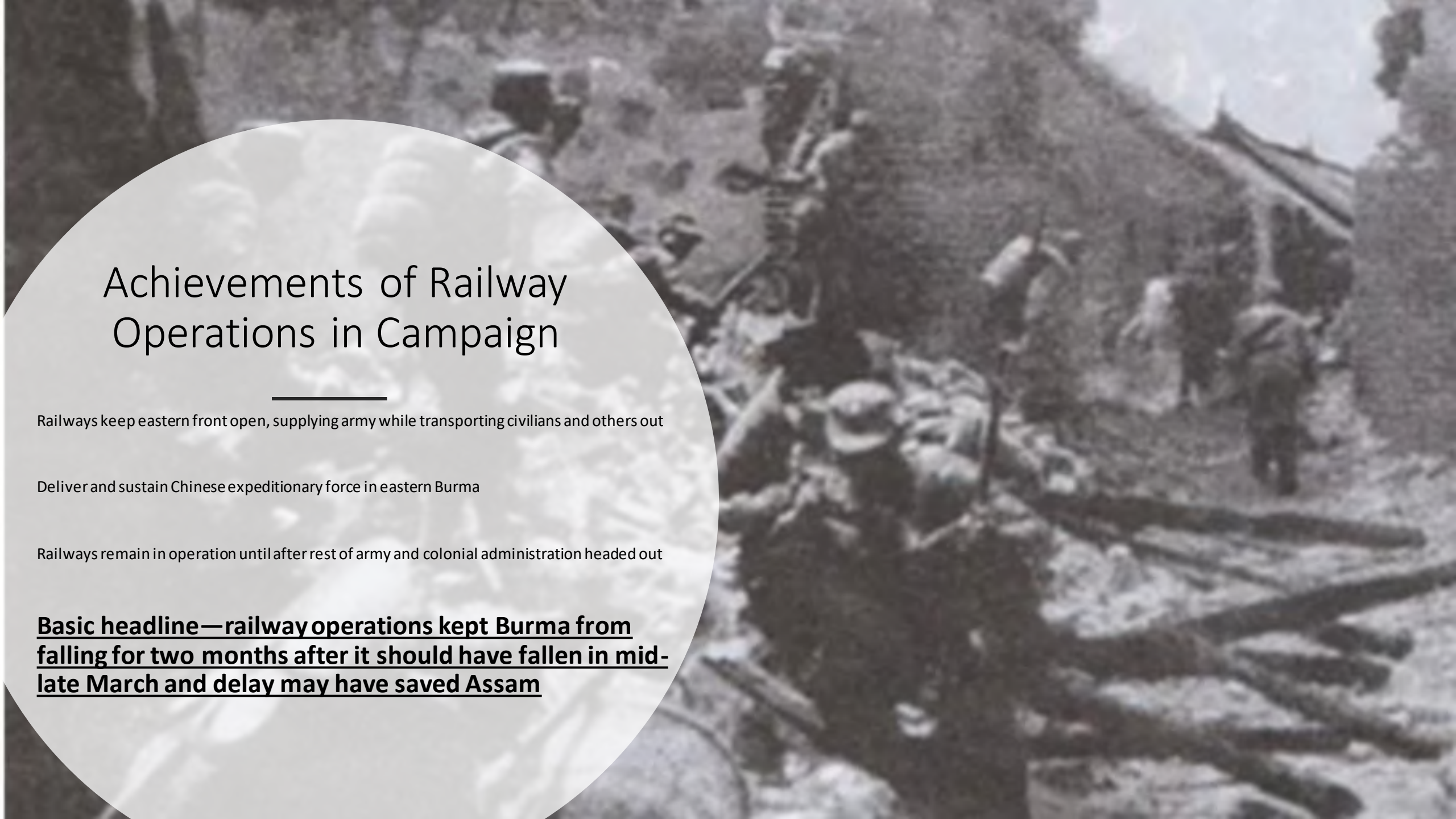
When supporting Chinese Expeditionary Force, Burma Railway workers do not speak Chinese and much of the Chinese army does not speak English

Chinese KMT alienates Burmese population through harsh actions

Chinese officers commandeer engines (hold railwaymen at gunpoint)

Locomotive Density During the First Burma Campaign





Achievements of Railway Operations in Campaign

Railways keep eastern front open, supplying army while transporting civilians and others out

Deliver and sustain Chinese expeditionary force in eastern Burma

Railways remain in operation until after rest of army and colonial administration headed out

Basic headline—railway operations kept Burma from falling for two months after it should have fallen in mid-late March and delay may have saved Assam

Mobilizing Lessons Learned

Burma railwaymen made instructors at new transportation schools in India where they lecture on running railways under attack

Others are made commanders of new military railway operating units on the Assam Line of Communications

(India adopts new Movement Control as well)

