

## Transcribed Excerpt from Interview with Merrill's Marauders Commando Grant Jiro Hirabayashi, June 29, 2005

**Grant Hirabayashi:** First let me explain the military situation facing the Merrill's Marauders. The Japanese famed 18th Division, "Kurume Shidan", which played the vital role in the fall of Singapore and the capture of Burma, was positioned in the Hukawn and Mogaung Valleys through which the proposed Ledo Road was to be built to link with the Burma Road to provide a land route to China. In order to complete the Ledo Road, it was necessary to clear the valleys of Japanese troops and to capture the all-weather airstrip in Myitkyina. The capture of the airstrip would not only provide additional landing place for our cargo aircrafts, but deny the Japanese use of the airstrip to re-supply their troops. To accomplish this mission, it was necessary for the Marauders to make swift raids behind enemy lines, disrupting enemy communication and supply lines, and destroying enemy strongholds, while the American trained Chinese troops made the frontal attack.

**Terry Shima:** Why did you need to hike 700 miles to reach your destination? Was there no railroad or vehicle road?

**GH:** There was no railroad in the dense jungle of northern Burma and roads and trails were under enemy patrol. In order to evade detection and to maximize the use of the element of surprise, the Marauders would swing around the enemy by cutting through jungles, wading through rivers and climbing mountains.

**TS:** Did you have contact with the enemy during the trek?

**GH:** The jungle was so dense that the enemy was out of sight but within hearing distance. The enemy I saw was all KI. The first live enemy soldier I saw in Burma was at the Myitkyina airstrip.

**TS:** Was the travel during day, night? What was the longest distance the troops hiked in one day?

**GH:** It was quite common for each battalion/column to operate independently, so I can only speak for the First Battalion/Red Combat Team. The travel, in general, was during the day, but I can vividly recall when we marched day and night to rescue the Second Battalion under siege at Nhpum-Ga. I can't recall the longest distance hiked in one day.

**TS:** How long did it take to walk the 700 miles?

**GH:** We entered Burma about the 21st of February, 1944 and the Marauders launched their attack on the Myitkyina airstrip on May 17th and that adds up to a total of 86 days.

**TS:** What was the condition of the troops at the end of the 700 mile hike?

**GH:** When the Marauders captured the Myitkyina airstrip after fighting through 5 major and 30 minor engagements, their ranks were depleted by disease, physical and mental fatigue and casualties. It is estimated that only 200 Marauders remained of the original outfit of 3,000 men who could, if necessary, carry on for a week or longer.

**TS:** Did the commanders know in advance you all had to hike 700 miles over such difficult terrain?

**GH:** What I know now is that according to the "plans and assumption" of the War Department as set forth in a telegram from General Marshall to General Stilwell of September 30, 1943, was "that Galahad (code name for the Marauders) is provided for one major operation of approximately three months duration ..." Although there is no mention of the final objective - the Myitkyina airstrip - I assume the answer is yes, they knew.