I N 1941 the British Army began preparations to give technical aid and training to the Chinese guerillas who were operating against the Japanese. A Military Mission named “204 Mission” was established in Chungking to direct this work and the Chinese agreed to raise six guerilla battalions to each of which a demolition squad of British officers and other ranks would be attached.

Meanwhile at Maymyo in Burma a Bush Warfare School had been established for training the British squads in guerilla tactics. To it were sent a number of Britons with knowledge of the interior of China and volunteers from British units in Hong Kong, Burma and Malaya; from commando units in the Middle East; and from the 8th Australian Division. This school trained a force about 250 strong organised initially into six contingents.

The Australian contingent was about 40 strong and was drawn from seven units of the 8th Division. The men who volunteered for this special service were discharged from their units in the 8th Division on 27th July 1941 and shipped to Rangoon, whence they travelled to Maymyo.¹ There and elsewhere in northern Burma they engaged in strenuous training for the following six months.²

Mission 204 did not set out for China until 25th January 1942. At the air force station at Lashio the men were loaded into vehicles containing six months' rations and large quantities of explosives, and in these they made the hazardous journey over the Burma Road to Kunming where they were reloaded into Chinese Army trucks. In these the journey continued over frozen and sometimes snow-covered roads. Near Hocki on 15th February the Australians loaded their stores and some trucks into a train, and on 17th February they reached quarters at Kiyang, having travelled 2,100 miles in 25 days.

At this stage the men began to get restless. Their departure from Burma had been delayed for six weeks after Japan attacked; this, according to one Australian diarist, was due to “awful staff work”. It was originally intended that the force should operate about Canton and Shanghai; now the plan was to operate in the Changsha-Hankow-Nanchang area in northern Kiangsi, but at the end of March no move had been made. On 16th March news arrived that Major-General Dennys, head of Mission 204, had been killed in an air crash at Kunming. He was succeeded by

¹ The chief instructor and, later, commandant of this school was Major (later Brigadier) J. M. Calvert of the Royal Engineers who, as mentioned, had been one of the instructors of the Australian and New Zealand Independent Companies.

² A lively account of the Australians' experiences in Burma and later is given in The Surprising Battalion (1945) by W. Noonan, a member of the force.
Brigadier Bruce, an Indian Army officer and noted Himalayan mountaineer.

The men of the Mission were now very fit, having done long route marches in the mountains carrying packs weighing about 30 lbs, but combined training with the Chinese battalions has been anything but successful (wrote one officer). Their standard of training is not very high; operations would be difficult and hazardous. Nevertheless I like the officers of our [Chinese] battalion and I think that if the first few shows hold an amount of luck, future operations may be fair.

On 20th April, after weeks of training interspersed with parties and other diversions, an operation order arrived from headquarters in Chungking: the force was to operate in Burma. The plan was to walk from the railhead 275 miles to Kweiyang, and travel thence by truck to Lashio. The force set out by rail on 2nd May and then was brought back again. On 5th May “everyone is hoping and wishing that we shall be flown to India and this Mission abandoned”. On 31st May General Bruce, with the Australian Minister at Chungking, Sir Frederic Eggleston, arrived at the camp; they brought news that the force would operate in northern Kiangsi as originally planned. The force—now three contingents, including one of Australians commanded by Major Braund—went by rail to Hengyang, then by river sampans to Changsha, which was reached on 8th June. On 18th June the sampans reached Liuyang; by 27th June they had reached

---

8 Maj-Gen J. G. Bruce, CB, DSO, MC, Deputy Director Military Operations, India, 1941-42; Maj-Gen i/c British Military Mission, China, 1942; DCGS Indian Army 1944-46. Regular soldier; b. 4 Dec 1896.

4 Maj F. N. B. Braund, NX12551. 2/19 Bn; Mission 204; 2/4 Bn. Solicitor; of Turramurra, NSW; b. Neutral Bay, NSW, 8 Jan 1914.
Kuantu and stores were off-loaded. Thence the force set off, with coolies as carriers, towards their area of operations. They travelled over the mountains often in heavy rain and came to disease-ridden country near the Kiangsi border where a Chinese colonel informed them they would not last a month.

The impression was growing among the Australians that the Chinese did not want foreign troops but only foreign equipment; and that Mission 204 was an embarrassment to the Chinese. They were becoming aware of the jealousies and mistrust that existed between one Chinese commander and another, and that treachery was not infrequent. The men’s quarters were filthy and the men began to fall sick in increasing numbers. In the second week of July two men died, presumably of typhus. Others now had malaria and dysentery. At one stage the troops had received no mail for six months. In August there was more exhausting marching in the area west of the Nanchang-Kiukiang railway and illnesses increased, but there was still no indication that the force would be allowed near the Japanese.

In October and November the contingents moved back to Kunming where General Bruce met them and spoke to them sympathetically. Thence on 29th October the Australians were flown to Assam and taken by train to Calcutta. From India the Australian contingent sailed for home.