

## **BURMA - THE REFUGEES**

The bombing of Rangoon on December 23<sup>rd</sup> 1941 caused a wave of refugees to flee the city. Those that could sailed from the port of Rangoon to Calcutta or Chittagong, the majority however were left to take an overland route to India. One option was to travel through the Taungap Pass to Akyab and then take a boat to India, but this route was closed by the beginning of March 1942. The only other option was to head North to Mandalay, a few, mainly Europeans were flown to India, but the remaining Refugees set off walking or if they were lucky by train as far as the line would run.

This was not a Sunday afternoon walk, the vast majority was Indian, Coolis, Sweepers, Servants and Shop Keepers who the British had encouraged to Burma to create the Service Industry that the Colonial Administration needed. These were very vulnerable people who had to trek several hundred miles across some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world and there was very little support from the Burmese Government. There are no precise figures for the number of people trekking to India, but a figure of 500,000 is generally accepted. Disease, Starvation, Exhaustion and depredations of gangs of Burmese bandits claimed, it is estimated over 50,000 lives. The bones of those that failed to reach India littered the Jungle tracks for years.