

## The Role of General Maha Bandula in the Battle of Danubyu in 1825

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### Abstract

General Maha Bandula was Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Myanmar Armed Forces from 1821 until his death in 1825 in the First Anglo-Myanmar War. General Maha Bandula was a key figure in the Konbaung Dynasty's policy of expansionism in Manipur and Assam that ultimately resulted in the war and the beginning of the downfall of the dynasty. During the First Anglo-Myanmar War, the battle of Danubyu was famous among other battles which led and resisted by General Maha Bandula. When his headquarters fell to the British, he retreated to prepare for the defense of Danubyu. In March 1825, the British attacked Danubyu Stockade which General Maha Bandula defended courageously. After he was killed in the battle of Danubyu, resistance collapsed and Danubyu fell and the British advanced to Pyay signaling defeat for the Myanmar. General Maha Bandula was one of the valiant generals during the 19th century in Myanmar. Nonetheless, the general, who died in action, is celebrated as a national hero by the Myanmar for his resistance to the British.

**Keywords:** General Maha Bandula (Commander-in-chief), Danubyu Stockade, Battle of Danubyu

### INTRODUCTION

In January 1824, General Maha Bandula assumed command in Rakhine and started on a campaign against Sittagong with the ultimate goal to capture Bengal. In response, on 5 March 1824, the British declared war on Myanmar from their headquarters at Fort William in Calcutta. The British's plan was to draw away General Maha Bandula's forces from the Bengal frontier by performing a large-scale, sea-borne invasion of Lower Burma. The attack on Rangoon (Yangon), led by Sir Archibald Campbell, completely surprised the Myanmar and the city was taken on 10 May, 1824, without any loss to the invaders. The news of the fall of Yangon forced General Maha Bandula to a quick retreat. The British's force in Yangon had meanwhile been unable to proceed upcountry because it did not have adequate river transports. After being resupplied after the monsoon Campbell continued the operations and in 1825, at the battle of Danubyu, General Maha Bandula was killed and at the moment, in Rakhine, Lower Myanmar, and Taninthayi were conquered. General Maha Bandula was renowned in Myanmar history for his patriotic spirit and the bold fight against the British imperialist army.

### Aim and objectives

The purpose of this research paper is firstly to study causes of the First Anglo-Myanmar War, secondly to trace the battle of Danubyu which led by Myanmar famous hero, General Maha Bandula, thirdly to examine the condition of Danubyu Fort during the period of the First Anglo-Myanmar War.

### DISCUSSION

The First Anglo-Myanmar War arose out of the considerable border friction. Until the late of 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Rakhine state had acted as a buffer between the expansionists in Myanmar Empire and the equally voracious British. However, Rakhine fell to the Myanmar, in 1784, and brought their borders to contact nearly the city of Sittagong in the Bengal region.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John F Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965, Print, p.68 (Hereafter cited as Cady, *Modern Burma*)

The Trouble frequently occurred due to the thousands of Rakhinese refugees then living in Sittagong, but initially promises by the British to repress banditry from the area kept relations friendly. When the number of refugees rose during the 1790's, the frictions would rise banditry turned to the rebellions in Sittagong.<sup>1</sup>

The court at Innwa demanded that these refugees, for the crime of staging rebellions from Bengal, should be turned over for prosecution. Initially agreeing to do so, the British became reluctant to extradite after some of the refugees were starved to death in Innwa.<sup>2</sup> In 1811, however, the son of Nga Than De, Chan Byan, led a rebel army to reclaim the Rakhine and petitioned the British for suzerainty over the area; his recruitments were bolstered by the 40,000 people to flee the conscription by Innwa.<sup>3</sup> The Myanmar court assumed that the British were involved, and the crisis continued until 1815 when Chan Byan died. However, the British refusals to turn over those rebels in Sittagong and Chan's petition for suzerainty would guarantee of Myanmar suspicion and ire. The next king of Myanmar, Bagyidaw, continually conquered along the border, annexed the states of Assam and Manipur while menacing British guaranteed Chahar in 1824. A large Myanmar army presence, following on the years of expansionist activities brought matters the near of the breaking point.<sup>4</sup>

Both Calcutta and Innwa claimed that the small island of Shampuri (Shinmaphyu) in the River Naaf, and it was garrisoned at the time by Indian sepoy. Myanmar attacked and drove the sepoy out. The island traded hands a number of times, partially due to the fact no garrison of any size that was viable there due to the unhealthy environment.<sup>5</sup> When two British and Innwa officers were kidnapped and imprisoned while trying to survey the British-Myanmar border, Governor General Amherst declared war on 5 March, 1824.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of a land invasion, Britain was at a considerable disadvantage. The border region between India and Myanmar was an area of mountainous jungle with no fit roads for the conveying of artillery; a key part of British warfare. The English would suffer more than enough losses due to disease in this war, and the idea of marching across this territory into Myanmar was out of the question, especially once the monsoon has started. Instead, Assam and Rakhine were to be taken to act as a buffer between Myanmar and Sittagong.<sup>7</sup> However, the attacks on Assam gained the Britain a little and General Maha Bandula, Myanmar's greatest general, was successful in smashing the British forces in the north. In early May, he was victorious over the garrison between Rakhine and Sittagong and gained a clear field into Bengal. In fact, Sittagong could very well be taken, if the general had pressed on. He could not know, however, that is war but lightly held.<sup>8</sup>

On the death of the Thunba Wungyi, the king and his advisers seemed to recognize the gravity of the crisis. General Maha Bandula was recalled from Rakhine with the greater portion of his army. Seeing that the British by means of their armed boats, and more especially the

<sup>1</sup> Cady, *Modern Burma*, pp.69-70

<sup>2</sup> Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*. London: Duckworth, 1989. Print, p.443 (Hereafter cited as Moon, *The British Conquest*)

<sup>3</sup> Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Myanmar*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print, p.18 (Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Myanmar*)

<sup>4</sup> Cady, *Modern Burma*, p.72

<sup>5</sup> Moon, *The British Conquest*, p.434

<sup>6</sup> Ian. Herson, *The Savage Empire: Forgotten Wars of the Eighteenth Century*, Thrupp: Sutton Press, 2000, p.25 (Hereafter cited as Herson, *The Savage Empire*)

<sup>7</sup> George Bruce, *The Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*, London: Hart-Davis, Mac Gibbon, 1973, p.39 (Hereafter cited as Bruce, *Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*)

<sup>8</sup> Bruce, *Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*, pp.41-45

small steamer, would command the Ayeyarwady River and Myanmar armies were posted on their banks. That on the right bank was under the command of the king's brother, the prince of Tharawady, and that on the left by the Kyi Wungyi. The former had his headquarters at Danubyu; the latter at Htantabin, on the Hlaing river, about twenty miles above Yangon. The *Rewun* had command of small bodies of troops, and was active in attacking the outlying British pickets to the north of the great pagoda (Shwedagon Pagoda), and cutting off stragglers. General Maha Bandula having returned from Rakhine, proceeded to the capital.<sup>1</sup>

The British general sent a combined force, Innwa and military, up the Hlaing River to Htantabin, which destroyed the stockades erected by the Kyi Wungyi Maha Mingaung. A column composed of Madras native troops, under Colonel Smith, the same day marched northward by land, with the view of distracting the attention of the enemy. Several unfinished works were passed, and information was received of a strong stockade at Kyaikkalo, being about twelve miles from Yangon, where the Thado Wun, steward of the palace, with the *Rewun* as second in command, had a garrison of chosen men and guns mounted. Attack was made on the principal of stockade in two columns, and failed.<sup>2</sup>

The whole force retreated in disorder after severe loss in killed and wounded. A column at once marched to retrieve this disaster. The stockades at Kyaikkalo were found to be deserted, and the troops, pushing on to a town six miles in advance, came there on a stockade also empty. From the destruction of the works at Htantabin, the Kyi Wungyi deemed it imprudent to remain within striking distance of such active foes, and withdrew his troops from their advanced positions. But General Maha Bandula, in taking supreme command, viewed the whole condition of affairs as very favourable, and the king and his court were highly elated at the last success. The Kyi Wungyi, however, was deprived of his command, though not disgraced.<sup>3</sup>

General Maha Bandula was appointed as *Sitthugyi* (Commander-in-chief) by the king in the southern provinces. He took over the command at Danubyu. General Maha Bandula crossed the Ayeyarwady at Danubyu, last week of and thence to the left bank of the Hlaing with the bulk of his army. After four or five days' march the whole of the army was in position before the British lines. It occupied the space extending in an irregular semicircle from Kyimyindaing on the Myanmar right, to the Pazundung River on the left. A numerous body of troops also crossed the Yangon River to the Dala side, and threw up batteries to fire on the shipping. On the river itself were war-boats, and what were much more dangerous to the British, fire-rafts ready to be launched.<sup>4</sup>

In front of Myanmar was everywhere protected by earthen breastworks, which had been constructed with astonishing rapidity. It was not without reason, calculating from his past experiences, that General Maha Bandula felt sure of success. Of the British force, disease allowed not more than thirteen hundred Europeans to be present under arms, with about two thousand five hundred native troops. The key of the position to be defended that was the great pagoda, which was certain to be the main point of attack. It was well garrisoned, and had twenty guns mounted on the upper terrace. The troops at Pazundaung and Dala had been withdrawn. A brick building, known as the white house, about one mile south-east of the great

<sup>1</sup> (a) Hein Zay, *အင်္ဂလိပ်နှင့်မြန်မာ့စစ်ပွဲများနှင့်မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ* (*Wars and Myanmar which Broke out with English*), Yangon, Shwe Chinthage Press, 2010, p.110 (Hereafter cited as Hein Zay, *Wars and Myanmar*)

(b) Sir Arthur, P. Phayre, *History of Burma*, London, Trubner & Co. Ludgate Hill, 1883, p.243 (Hereafter cited as Phayre, *History of Burma*)

<sup>2</sup> Hein Zay, *Wars and Myanmar*, pp.87-88

<sup>3</sup> (a) *Ibid*, p.88

(b) Phayre, *History of Burma*, p.244

<sup>4</sup> Hein Zay, *Wars and Myanmar*, pp.70-73

pagoda, was held on the extreme British right; and on the left the stockade at Kyimyindaing, which was supported by the ships of war, the steamer, and gunboats. Reserves were posted in rear of the great pagoda and extending towards the town.<sup>1</sup>

The object of the British general was to allow the enemy to establish himself, close up to the position, whereby he could be readily reached; and to tempt him, if possible, to an engagement on open ground. General Maha Bandula rapidly developed his plan of attack. One division advanced to within a mile of the great pagoda, and threw up entrenchments, while a strong column established itself to the east of the pagoda, resting on the royal lake. The latter was at once attacked and driven from its position. A successful sortie was also made on the works in front of the pagoda. It was impossible to hold these positions when won, and on the following day the Myanmar advanced their entrenchments to within three hundred yards of the great pagoda. The post at Kyimyindaing was vigorously attacked, and menacing fire-rafts, launched with the ebb tide at the ships of War, were with difficulty warded off. At last, the left wing of the Myanmar army deployed on the open ground adjoining the royal lake, and gave an opportunity to the British general to strike a blow. Gunboats worked up the Pazundaung creek to aid the attack, and two columns advanced eagerly to throw themselves on the enemy. The works were carried, the Myanmar abandoning their guns, colours, muskets, and much ammunition, and leaving many dead and wounded. The centre of the investing army renewed the attack on the pagoda, but was repulsed with great slaughter; and a similar result befell at Kyimyindaing. The division which was entrenched at Dala was driven out two days later.<sup>2</sup>

The Myanmar army rallied close to the ground from which it had been driven, and the British force was too weak in numbers and from fatigue to attempt pursuit. An old stockade at Kokkaing, two miles from the great pagoda, had been repaired and strengthened, and Maha Thilawa, formerly in Assam, was in command. The town of Yangon was fired by emissaries, who gained entrance without attracting notice, in hope that the magazines might be destroyed. This design was frustrated, and on the following day the stockade at Kokkaing was stormed. General Maha Bandula, now despairing of success, retired rapidly with seven thousands of his best men to Danubyu, while Maha Thilawa, fled to Hmawbi. The greater part of the investing army broke up, and the men dispersed.<sup>3</sup>

The rainy season having ended, the health of the troops improved, but fresh provisions were yet scarce. Preparations were made to advance on Pyay, where it was hoped the Myanmar government would be disposed to treat. General Maha Bandula had determined to make a stand at Danubyu, about sixty miles from Yangon, but the British general had no information either as to the strength of his army, or the nature of the stronghold which he had constructed on the river-bank at that place. The British force, to move up the valley of the Ayeyarwady, was divided into two columns. There were also numerous boats of various tonnage carrying heavy guns and mortars, ordnance stores and provisions. The land column was composed of thirteen hundred Europeans, one thousand sepoy, three hundred of the governor general's bodyguard, a troop of horse-artillery, and a rocket troop. The number of men seemed small for the enterprise of dictating terms to a haughty power, "which for more than sixty years had triumphed over the neighbouring nations; but no one doubted of success."<sup>4</sup>

The surface of the country was now dry, and the land column marched northwards to Hlaing, and thence to Tharlalaw on the Ayeyarwady. There had been no communication with

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<sup>1</sup> (a) Hein Zay, *Wars and Myanmar*, p.106  
 (b) Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp.244-245

<sup>2</sup> Phayre, *History of Burma*, p.245

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp.246-247

<sup>4</sup> Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp.246-247

General Cotton. That officer had proceeded up the Panhlaing River into the great river without much opposition. When near Danubyu, he found that General Maha Bandula was with his army in an extensive stockade on the right bank of the river. There were also two smaller works below the larger one. The southernmost of these, which enclosed the town pagoda, was attacked and carried. The party which attempted to storm the next work was repulsed with severe loss. General Cotton re-embarked his men at the same night. It was reported that the garrison of the main stockade amounted to fifteen thousand men, with a hundred and fifty guns mounted. A Myanmar was found to carry a dispatch to General Campbell, which reached him when he was two marches beyond the Tharlwal. Returning to that place, he crossed the river by means of canoes he found on the bank, and marched down to Danubyu.<sup>1</sup>

General Maha Bandula would be forced to abandon his invasion of Sittagong as British forces sailed through the Bay of Bengal to Yangon, taking the city in early May just as the monsoon began.<sup>2</sup> The government in Calcutta would release 11,000 men and a large flotilla of ships for an assault on Myanmar via of the Ayeyarwady River, on the mouth of which sits in Yangon.<sup>3</sup> The flotilla, led by the HMS Liffey and commanded by General Sir Archibald Campbell, was almost immediately fired upon once they had anchored off the city. A few broadsides from the British ships silenced the shore batteries and two brigades of soldiers landed, raising the Union Jack over Yangon a scant twenty minutes later; the first battle of the war had not occasioned a single British casualty. However, instead of finding a populace that would at least sell them supplies, the British force found a deserted city. The lack of supplies in Yangon was critical, as the trip from India had drained the British stores of beef and fresh water.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, without the river any conquest of Myanmar was nigh impossible. British command had, from the beginning, believed that any victory would have to come via maritime actions.<sup>5</sup> No roads capable of moving a large, European style force existed, and so a flotilla accompanying troops marching on the riverside was necessary. However, as Campbell explored further up from Yangon, usually sending out the scout boats, it became apparent the number of stockades the Myanmar had constructed along the river. To send the flotilla upriver would expose them to a great deal of fire both from the stockades and Myanmar vessels. Therefore, Campbell proceeded with men along the riverbank, attacking stockades in coordination with the navy. The tactic was highly successful; the casualties on the British side were usually quite light whereas hundreds of Myanmar was often killed by the end of such encounters.<sup>6</sup> Victories continued for the British, and eventually the entire Myanmar coast was occupied. However, Godwin's numbers were dwindling and by October only 1,300 British troops were fit for service beyond Yangon.<sup>7</sup>

The General Maha Bandula, forced to break off his invasion of Bengal due to British forces being present in Myanmar, turned his back on India and marched back to Innwa to receive the new orders. Starting out in August, during the worst of the rains, he marched his men across some of the worst terrain in the country back to Innwa to receive new orders; a feat one author has compared to Hannibal's crossing of the Alps.<sup>8</sup> Upon his return, he was ordered

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.249

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, *Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*, p.46

<sup>3</sup> Cady, *Modern Burma*, p.72

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, *Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*, pp. 32-35

<sup>5</sup> Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, London: The Cresset Press, 1962. Print, p.63 (Hereafter cited as Woodman, *Making of Burma*)

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, *Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*, p.49-50

<sup>7</sup> Woodman, *Making of Burma*, p.62

<sup>8</sup> Hernon, *The Savage Empire*, p.31

by King Bagyidaw to lead a 60,000-man host to march in relief of Yangon. The British, ill-supplied and wracked by illness could muster about 4,000 were now facing over seven times their numbers. On 1<sup>st</sup>, December at the fort at Kyimyindaing outside Yangon, General Maha Bandula appeared with his army.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the repeated large-scale attacks against the fort and the city itself were consistently beaten back. There are two major reasons why the British were able to repel Bandula's army. First, it is estimated only about half of his army had muskets, and these were an older 18<sup>th</sup> century variety that would have been far less reliable compared to the modern British muskets.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, General Maha Bandula decided to fight in a way that favored the British; he attacked head on attempting to storm the city after digging a series of trenches. Such tactics arose from a desire to capture or kill as many British soldiers as possible, rather than depending on the far better tactic of guerrilla warfare. By sticking to such tactics, General Maha Bandula could have simply held the British off until disease thinned their ranks to the point of retreat.<sup>3</sup> In the face of exploding shells they advanced, only to find an entrenched foe that could fire almost twice as fast as them and charged the Myanmar lines with bayonets as they reloaded. Only 7,000 of General Maha Bandula's army were able to retreat to Danubyu at the head of the delta.<sup>4</sup>

General Maha Bandula's troops were planned in a semicircle from Dala, round through the Kyimyindaing and the Shwedagon Pagoda to the village of Puzundaung. His first attack on the British post at Kyimyindaing was repulsed. On 3 and 4 December, he returned to the attack. The passage of the river was defended by the British ships against "the most furious assaults of the enemy's war boats, advancing under cover of the most tremendous fire-rafts which the unwearied exertions of British sailors could alone have conquered." Then, on 5 December, Sir Archibald Campbell successfully attacked General Maha Bandula's right wing. Sir Archibald Campbell wrote to the Company's Secret and Political Department as "The total defeat of General Maha Bandula's army was now most fully accomplished." His loss in killed and wounded, from the nature of the ground, it is impossible to calculate, but I am confident, I do not exceed the fairest limit, when I state it at 5,000 men. In every other respect the mighty host, which so lately threatened to overwhelm us, now scarcely exists.<sup>5</sup>

Sir Archibald Campbell's calculation proved that wrong. On 14 December, General Maha Bandula's emissaries set fire to Yangon and destroyed a quarter of the town. On 16 December, we find him saying in a dispatch that General Maha Bandula had succeeded in rallying and forming a force amounting to between 20,000 and 25,000 men, who General Maha Bandula's defeat in Kokkaing combined with the loss of nearly 200 of his war-boats, forced a reconsideration of his position. He did not again attempt offensive operation, but concentrated on defending his position along the river. He established his headquarters at Danubyu on a raised part of the Delta, commanding the main water route from Yangon up country at a point where the road from Yangon to Pathein crossed the main Ayeyarwady and continued along the high ground to Pathein. "In other words", the journal of the Myanmar Research Society article points out, "it was a central junction and supply depot; it was probably

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce, *Burmese Wars: 1824-1886*, p.80

<sup>2</sup> Maung Htin Aung, *A History of Myanmar*, New York: Columbia University Press. 1967, p. 213 (Hereafter cited as Htin Aung, *History of Myanmar*)

<sup>3</sup> Woodman, *Making of Burma*, p.73

<sup>4</sup> Htin Aung, *History of Myanmar*, p.213

<sup>5</sup> Horace Hayman Wilson, *Narrative of the Burmese War in 1824-26*, as Originally Compiled from Official documents, London: Wm. H. Allen, 1852, Document, No.76 (Hereafter cited as Wilson, *Burmese War in 1824-26*)

the disinclination to abandon the supplies of all kinds collected there that determined General Maha Bandula to hold the fortress.”<sup>1</sup>

Sir Archibald Campbell now tried to persuade the Mons in the Delta to rebel. There was some response and Mons support to the British armies in the rear was an important strategic asset when troops began their march to Innwa. By the middle of February, the plans were ready. One column of 2,468 men marched by road under Sir Archibald Campbell; the other of 1,169 men went by the river under General Cotton. A reserve of 3,781 was left in Yangon. When General Cotton arrived near Danubyu, he found General Maha Bandula ready to fight with about 15,000 troops. He sent a flag of truce to the Myanmar General on 1 March, with a summons to surrender the place giving one hour for reply. General Maha Bandula's reply arrived. It was dignified and conclusive: “We are each fighting for his country and you will find me as steady in defending mine, as you in maintaining the honors of yours. If you wish to see Danubyu come as friends and I will show it you. If you come as enemies, Land!”<sup>2</sup>

In the mean while General Maha Bandula and his men, assisted of course by all the labour that they could crimp or impress from the countryside, had been hard at work. The town of Danubyu was already surrounded by brick ramparts and a ditch as, in fact, were all Myanmar and Mon towns in that age, the whole town being inside the ramparts. The line of the fortifications was about 1,000 yards long on the river face and extended 500 or 600 yards inland, the whole forming rough oblong. In front of the brick walls General Maha Bandula erected a stockade of heavy timbers 17 feet high, firmly embedded in the earth and connected to the brick walls by cross-beams. In front of the stockade itself was a ditch from which the earth to make the bricks had been excavated, 18 feet wide and 8 feet deep. In front of the ditch was a wooden or bamboo fence or “railing” then a space of 18 feet sown thick with spikes, then another fence on 18 foot wide abates and furthest of all yet another fence.<sup>3</sup>

On the East and the front of river, however most of these defenses were omitted; the ramparts themselves came up almost to the river bank and the small space in between was occupied by gun batteries to which the river itself with its 40 foot high precipitous bank formed a satisfactory enough ditch. There were over 150 guns of all calibers in position while the defenses against shell-fire were singularly complete. Within General Maha Bandula had not only such townspeople as had not fled but also his own men estimated at 15, 000 infantry of whom possibly 50 percent had firearms, 70 elephants, 1,000 cavalry or Cassay Horse (cavalry from Manipur), a big powder magazine and factory, an arsenal which included carpenters' and blacksmiths' shops and finally enough grain for a twelve-month. It was, in fact, an appallingly strong position.<sup>4</sup>

The stockade of Danubyu extended for nearly a mile along a sloping bank of the Ayeyarwady – its breadth varying according to the nature of the ground, from five to eight hundred yards. The stockade was composed of the solid teak beams, from 15 to 17 feet high, driven firmly into the earth, and placed as closely as possible to each other behind this wooden wall, the old brick ramparts of the place rose to a considerable height, strengthening the front of defenses by means of cross beams, and affording a firm and elevated footing to the

<sup>1</sup> U Tin Maung Yin, *ခေတ်မြန်မာတည်တန် (Modern Making Myanmar)*, Yangon, Seitta Thukha Press, 1978, p.73 (Hereafter cited as Tin Maung Yin, *Modern Making Myanmar*)

<sup>2</sup> (a) Wilson, *Burmese War in 1824-26*, Document, No.81 (A), p.166

(b) Tin Maung Yin, *Modern Making Myanmar*, p.74

<sup>3</sup> Natmauk Hpone Kyaw, *အင်္ဂလိပ်-မြန်မာစစ်သမိုင်း (History of English-Myanmar War)*, Yangon, Bagan Publishing House, 1966, pp.88-89 (Hereafter cited as Hpone Kyaw, *History of English-Myanmar War*)

<sup>4</sup> (a) M.O Tanner, “Danubyu, A Forgotten Episode,” *JBR*, Vol. XXIX, Part II, pp.170.171 (Hereafter cited as Tanner, “Danubyu”)

(b) Hpone Kyaw, *History of English-Myanmar War*, pp.88-89

defendants. Upwards of a hundred and fifty guns and swivels were mounted on the works and the garrison was protected from the shells of the besiegers by numerous well-contrived traverses and excavations.<sup>1</sup>

A ditch of considerable magnitude and depth surrounded the defenses, the passage of which was rendered still more difficult by spikes, nails, holes and other contrivances. Beyond the ditch, several rows of strong railing were next interposed and in front of all an abates, thirty yards broad and otherwise of a most formidable description extended round the place except on the river face where the deep and the rapid Ayeyarwady presented a sufficient barrier. Before the right face or lowest down the river two strong outworks were constructed, the first of which had been taken by the marine column, the second having proved too strong to be carried by so small a force. A heavy and extensive jungle intervened between the right and rear faces.<sup>2</sup>

The fortified post of Danubyu was of considerable extent and breadth, situated on the right bank of the Ayeyarwady, the commanding its whole channel. The main work was a stockade parallelogram of one thousand by seven hundred yards. The river of face mounted fifty pieces of ordnance, of various sizes. The approach to the main structure from the south was defended by two out works, one about four hundred yards lower down the river, and another about three hundred yards above it. Each was constructed of square beams of timber, provided with platforms and pierced for cannon, and was strengthened by an exterior fosse the outer edge and a thick abates of felled trees and brushwood. The lowest outwork was a square of about two hundred yards with a pagoda in the center.<sup>3</sup> General Cotton's first attack failed, and he was reinforced by Sir Archibald Campbell's column, on 25 March. He reported to the Secret and Political Department: "We are now, night and day, employed in preparations for the reduction of Danubyu. It is commanded by General Maha Bandula in person and the garrison is rated at fifteen thousand fighting men, of whom ten thousand are musketeers."<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1. Old City Wall  
Source: (Photo by Tin Pa Pa Win,6-11-2022)



Figure 2. Old fortress of Danubyu  
Source: (Photo by Tin Pa Pa Win, 6-11-2022)

The real attack on Danubyu began on 1 April, 1825. The mortar batteries and rockets began the work of destruction in this morning and continued firing at intervals during the day and succeeding the night, the enemy remained under the protection of their works and made little return to the British fire. The heavy guns were now ready in battery by the afternoon but were not brought into the regular use, only the necessary shots for the ranging purposes being fired. The mortars and the rockets however were kept hard at work and the fire was continued

<sup>1</sup> J.J, Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, London, John Murray, 1827, p.165 (Hereafter cited as Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*)

<sup>2</sup> Snodgrass, *Narrative of the Burmese War*, pp.165-167

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Burmese War in 1824-26*, pp.175-176

<sup>4</sup> Tin Maung Yin, *Modern Making Myanmar*, p.74



all night causing much loss inside the crowded fortifications. At daylight, the breaching batteries opened in the earnest and for a short space of time smashed their heavy missiles into Danubyu but to the utter surprise of everyone practically no reply to came from the ramparts. Suddenly a group of Myanmar deserters together with a couple of lascars, who had been taken prisoners, ran into the British trenchers with the astounding news that Danubyu had been evacuated. The troops who were already waiting under the arms simply walked peacefully across the open ground and into Danubyu unopposed. Resistance had collapsed like a house of cards. The reason for the abandonment was not far to seek. On reconnaissance, the strength of General Maha Bandula's fort was evident, and the form of attack was necessary. Trenches and batteries were constructed about three hundred yards distant from the north-west angle. General Cotton, who had dropped down the river, came up with his column; mortars and heavy guns were landed and placed in battery; fire was opened, and continued with little intermission for several hours. All was ready for the assault early in the day, when it was found that the fort had been evacuated during the night. General Maha Bandula had been killed, and his brother, the second in command, could not keep the garrison together. Guns, powder, and immense stores of rice fell to the victors.<sup>1</sup>

General Maha Bandula's tactics at Danubyu have often been questioned. If he had continued to adopt the guerilla tactics of his earlier days, he could have presented the British forces with a problem not unlike that in Malaya. Professor Pearn states that "if he had continued the harassing tactics of making frequent the small scale of attacks on out-posts and cutting off the foraging parties, the Company's force would have been kept immobilized until in the disgust of the whole operation was abandoned." That seems unlikely, but the suggestion is probably correct that General Maha Bandula had not grasped the overall tactics of the British military strategy.<sup>2</sup>

Two failed British attempts to send reinforcements overland to Yangon were abandoned when the territory through Cachar and Rakhine could not be penetrated. The upside to the Rakhine expedition, though it also occasioned an act of rebellion by sepoys, was that the province was officially taken from the Myanmar.<sup>3</sup>

After the Yangon army was resupplied from Calcutta in early 1825, General Campbell proceeded to the north along the Ayeyarwady, accompanied by the Innwa vessels providing artillery support and acting as supply ships. The attack at Danubyu situated at the head of the Ayeyarwady river on delta, though it would cost the British "severe casualties", ended as an important victory for the British; General Maha Bandula was struck by a shell and instantly killed. The Myanmar garrison immediately withdrew after the losing of their commander.<sup>4</sup> It turns out that General Maha Bandula, dishonored by his defeat at Yangon, refused to take shelter from the British bombardment saying, "If I die the enemy, will attribute victory to that. They cannot say our soldiers were not brave." Refusing even to eschew his gilded umbrella, he was a clear target for gunners.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (a) Tanner, "Danubyu", pp.173-174  
 (b) Woodman, *Making of Burma*, 76  
 (c) Tin Maung Yin, *Modern Making Myanmar*, pp.74-75  
<sup>2</sup> (a) Woodman, *Making of Burma*, p.77  
 (b) Tin Maung Yin, *Modern Making Myanmar*, p.75  
<sup>3</sup> Moon, *The British Conquest*, pp.437-439  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.440  
<sup>5</sup> Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Myanmar*, p.29

## CONCLUSION

General Maha Bandula's continued popularity is because of his courage to fight on against an overwhelmingly superior enemy. Perhaps, it is also because General Maha Bandula as the proxy for the last glory days of the Third Myanmar Empire. The Myanmar remember that General Maha Bandula's death was followed by a series of one ignominious setback after another that eventually led to the loss of sovereignty in 1885. Indeed, some would say the ignominious setbacks continue up to this day. For whatever reason, General Maha Bandula remains the most famous general in Myanmar history. During that space of time, even the British army was shocked to recognize General Maha Bandula's brilliant and brave fight-back power and military tactics. He was honored and recognized by all Asian countries for his gallantry and patriotism. He sacrificed their lives for the sake of independence, patriotism and own sovereignty. General Maha Bandula's heroic landmark will be embedded in Myanmar's hearts and in Myanmar history indeed. Our Myanmar deeply honor the heroic blood of General Maha Bandula.

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