

17 Division, leaving only the 17 Division, less one infantry brigade, 7 Armoured Brigade and Corps and Army Troops to withdraw via Ye-U on Kalewa.

The amended plan was confirmed in Operation Instruction No. 47 issued the following day.

54. *Events leading up to the Abandonment of the Mandalay-Irrawaddy Line.* At this time I was in close touch with General Stilwell and all plans were agreed with him. At a meeting at Shwebo, on the morning of the 29th April, General Stilwell informed me that the Chinese Fifth Army would, when Mandalay was given up, move to the north of Katha and that it would probably move thence to Bhamo. He was, however, uncertain on this point and was awaiting the Generalissimo's instructions. The capture of Lashio by the Japanese appeared imminent and this might force the withdrawal of the Chinese Fifth Army to India. General Stilwell also stated that exhaustion made it impossible for the Chinese 96 Division to take part in any fighting south of Mandalay and he therefore proposed to move this Division by train to Myitkyina as soon as possible. This left only the 22 Division to hold the crossings over the Myitnge River and therefore only a delaying action could be fought on this line. The 22 Division would have to continue its withdrawal up the left bank of the Irrawaddy eventually crossing by ferry at Singu. The weakness of the Chinese forces and the wide extent of the front made it clear to me that the Mandalay-Irrawaddy position could not be held for very long. General Stilwell asked that the 38 Division should revert to his command to cover the withdrawal to the north of the Fifth Army. I felt obliged to agree to this request.

55. India had already been asked to move supplies to Kalewa and, on the 29th April, Lieut.-Colonel Reynolds of the Q.M.G. Staff arrived by air at Shwebo. Lieut.-Colonel Reynolds was given details of the latest plan and strengths and these he telegraphed to Delhi. It was known that the condition of the road Tamu-Kalewa would not permit of traffic once the rains began, and the movement of stores south of Tamu would have to be via the Rivers Yu and Chindwin. The maintenance capacity of this route was not known in any detail at Burma Army Headquarters and therefore it was not known what force could be maintained south of Tamu.

Lieut.-Colonel Reynolds left Shwebo by air on the 1st May. On the 3rd May I received a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief in India to the effect that, while supplies had been sent to Kalewa, it was not possible to maintain south of Tamu and that therefore I was to clear my force north of Tamu as rapidly as the tactical situation permitted.

56. At this time, it was estimated that the stocking of the road from Ye-U to Kalewa would take seven days and therefore I was anxious to hold on to the Mandalay-Irrawaddy position for this period. I felt, however, that the possibilities of doing so were slight and I urged my Administrative Staff to accelerate their arrangements as much as possible. The shortage of transport at the disposal of the army made it necessary to withdraw lorries from all possible sources including the 7

Armoured Brigade and 1 Burcorps. During the next few days drastic steps were taken in this respect, units being made to dump kit and stores which did not affect their immediate fighting value.

57. Meanwhile, the withdrawal to the Irrawaddy proceeded according to plan. The Japanese 55 Division followed up rapidly the rear guard in the axis Meiktila-Mandalay. On the evening of the 28th April, tanks with the rear party made contact with enemy motorised infantry south of Kyaukse. On the 29th April, 48 Infantry Brigade supported by tanks and artillery fought a most successful action all day in the Kyaukse area, inflicting about 500 casualties on the enemy with small loss to themselves. The enemy pressed strongly, ferrying up infantry in M.T. They failed, however, to make any progress.

58. By the evening of 28th April, 1 Burma Division had completed its crossing of the Irrawaddy at the Sameikkon Ferry between Myingyan and Myinmu, and by the evening of the 30th April the whole of the Imperial Force had withdrawn north of the Irrawaddy. The 17 Division, which had crossed the river at the Ava Bridge, was moving as rapidly as possible to its positions west of the River Mu. The 38 Chinese Division, which had crossed by ferry, had taken up its positions east of the River Mu. 1 Burma Division was moving to Monywa with the intention of embarking the 13 Infantry Brigade for Kalewa and the 1 Burma Brigade for the defence of the right bank of the Chindwin. The demolition of two bays of the Ava Bridge was, with the full agreement of the Chinese, successfully carried out at 23.50 hours on the 30th April.

59. Earlier on this day, a report had been received that the Japanese had occupied Lashio. This constituted a direct threat to Bhamo and Myitkyina as had been foreseen. A number of casualties and evacuees were on their way by river to Katha for evacuation by train to Myitkyina and thence by air to India. It was impossible for me to spare any forces and indeed, in view of the chaotic conditions of the railways, to move any forces to Northern Burma. I therefore issued by telegram to Colonel Upton, the Commander of the Northern Burma Sub-Area, instructions as to the policy to be adopted for the defence of and evacuation from Myitkyina, Bhamo and Katha.

60. Reports were also received on the 30th April that Japanese columns were at Hsipaw and Maymyo and I had to consider the possibility of a small enemy force moving through Mogok to the Irrawaddy at Thabeikkyin and Male. On the evening of the 30th April, therefore, I established observation posts on the east bank of the Irrawaddy and moved one squadron of tanks and one company of motorised infantry to the north of Shwebo.

61. *The Battle of Monywa.* At about 19.00 hours on the 30th April, a Japanese force attacked from the right bank of the Chindwin, subsequently crossing the river and occupying the town. There was in Monywa at this time only a detachment of about 150 men of 1 Glosters, finding guards, and at Alon, north-west of Monywa, there was the Headquarters of 1 Burcorps with a protective detachment and a Frontier Force column. The troops at Monywa, who were taken by surprise, put up