

advance ended on the 9th March, on which date 98 Brigade was attacking Mandalay Hill and 64 Brigade the village of Patheingyi, two miles to the east. Meanwhile, 62 Brigade had turned off south-east from Madaya on the 8th March and struck through the forest-clad hills towards Maymyo, which was occupied on the 11th; the astonished Japanese only offering slight resistance. The following day a large enemy convoy of lorries and staff cars in this area was surprised and wiped out. The capture of Maymyo cut the enemy's communications between Mandalay and their forces facing Northern Combat Area Command on the Kyaukse—Lashio front.

114. Mandalay contains two areas of tactical importance: Mandalay Hill and Fort Dufferin. The former is a great rock feature, covered with pagodas and Buddhist monasteries, which rises some 750 feet above the surrounding paddy fields, completely dominating the city from the north-east. Fort Dufferin lies south-west of Mandalay Hill and about two miles from the river. It is encircled by a moat about 80 yards wide, while its 20-foot walls are backed with an earth embankment some 72 feet thick at the base. The manner in which these ancient types of defences withstood many of the most modern and scientific forms of attack, including skip-bombing and rocket attacks by aircraft, is not without interest. It is worth recording, however, that low-level bombing attacks by Thunderbolts caused a gap in the walls large enough to enable a tank to get through.

115. The attack on Mandalay Hill was launched by 98 Brigade early on the 9th March, and the hill was captured after 24 hours of the most bitter hand-to-hand fighting. The enemy fought to the end, the last defenders being killed by means of petrol drums, set on fire, which were rolled down into the tunnel they were holding. There followed three days of street fighting. By the 14th the city had been cleared and Fort Dufferin invested. A gallant attempt by 98 Brigade to storm the fort failed, the attackers being held up by the thick weed in the moat. Old fashioned siege warfare methods were then adopted, in order to avoid the casualties which a direct assault would have entailed: but even medium artillery, firing from 500 yards, and aerial rocket projectiles failed to break the massive walls, with their earth embankment. By the 19th March, however, the Japanese had had enough, and that night the remnants of the garrison attempted to escape through the ruins. The majority were intercepted and only a few got away. An immense quantity of equipment, chiefly ordnance stores, fell into our hands and 160 civilian internees were rescued. The capture of Mandalay was a fitting climax to a great advance. Between the date it crossed the Irrawaddy on the 9th January and the fall of Mandalay, 19 Indian Division had accounted for 6,000 Japanese killed, actually counted on the ground.

116. General Kimura's plan (paragraphs 109 and 110) to recapture Meiktila, both by cutting our communications thereto and by direct assault was energetically pursued. Early in March, a strong enemy force re-occupied Taungtha and the dominating hills to the north-east. This meant that nearly 5,000 unarmoured vehicles, comprising the administrative "tail"

of the formations in Meiktila, could not get through. As already stated (paragraph 110) 5 Indian Division had reached Nyaungu on the 15th March and to it was then allotted the difficult task of reopening the road to Meiktila.

117. In the Meiktila area, there was continuous fighting. While mobile columns of infantry and tanks were successfully operating against the enemy who were attempting to close in on the town, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing many guns, the Japanese were concentrating on capturing the airstrip, two miles north of Meiktila, on which our supplies depended. On the night 15th-16th March, their attacks reached the north-west corner of the airstrip where they dug in. They were successfully counter-attacked but their guns still dominated the strip, and the air-transportable brigade of 5 Indian Division, which was then being flown in landed under artillery fire. Several aircraft were destroyed, but the American Air Commandos were undeterred and no sortie turned back. The enemy then attacked in strength and succeeded in capturing the airstrip. This resulted in an immediate severe curtailment of supplies, including ammunition, since we had to fall back on "dropping" as opposed to "landing." There followed a week's fierce fighting to regain the strip. The enemy dug in in the broken country to the north, which was almost impassable for tanks, and strengthened the position with numerous anti-tank guns and minefields. This meant that the clearance of the strip was a job for the infantry, together with elements of the R.A.F. Regiment and R.A.F. Servicing Commandos, and it was achieved against the most determined opposition with the magnificent support of R.A.F. fighter-bombers. The Japanese artillery, however, still covered the airfield at almost point-blank range and further bitter close-quarter fighting was necessary before the enemy was routed. The whole area was cleared by the 29th March. The enemy's suicidal resistance cost him nearly all his guns and we inflicted tremendous casualties.

SECTION VIII (paras. 118-130) THE CLEARING OF THE MANDALAY PLAIN

The end of operations by Northern Combat Area Command: The opening of the road to Meiktila: The capture of Kyaukse: The clearing of Ava and Sagaing: The Japanese decision to withdraw: Shortage of transport aircraft: The achievements of 33 Corps.

118. In early March decisions were taken which resulted in Northern Combat Area Command's operations ceasing altogether by the end of the month. Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek was preparing his forces for an offensive in the Autumn of 1945, and for this he proposed to form an army of some thirty-six divisions, whose spearhead would be the five Chinese divisions from Burma, which had been trained at Ramgarh in India. He also required the American Mars Brigade from Burma to train fresh divisions in China on the lines of the Ramgarh-trained divisions. On the 8th March, the Supreme Allied Commander visited Chungking to confer with the Generalissimo on these matters. General Wedemeyer was not present as he had gone to Washington to consult the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the same issue. Admiral Mountbatten pointed out to the