

August and September, the "Hurribomber" again proving itself a most effective weapon for close support in jungle country, as the wreckage along the Tiddim Road testified. Tiddim itself fell on 18th October, and the way was now open for a double thrust towards Kalemio from the west and north. Japanese resistance in the Kennedy Peak area, albeit grim, proved no match for the experienced Allied troops and the accompanying air bombardment, and Kalemio fell on 15th November. With the capture of Kalewa on 2nd December the chapter of mountain warfare was closed and the Fourteenth Army was ready to debouch upon the plains of Central Burma.

22. Comparable progress had also been made in the Northern Combat Area Command sector, where the enemy garrison at Myitkyina had been reduced early in August. In the railway corridor, 36 Division, which had replaced Special Force, made steady progress; it captured Hopin on 7th September and by 10th December had reached the junction at Indaw. A drive southwards from Myitkyina carried Chinese units to Bhamo at approximately the same time. Thus by the end of the monsoon period the forces of the Northern Combat Area Command were in a position seriously to threaten the right flank of the enemy elements facing the Fourteenth Army.

23. Before the opening of the campaigning season proper, a certain number of changes had been made in the organisation of the ground forces facing the Japanese in Burma. Since with the converging advances of both the Fourteenth Army and the Northern Combat Area Command the opening of a continuous front in Central Burma seemed probable in the near future, Lieut.-General Sir Oliver Leese, Bart., K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., was allotted command of all the Allied Land Forces in Burma. This Headquarters absorbed that of 11 Army Corps, and was set up at Barrackpore outside Calcutta, while an off-shoot was maintained at Kandy. 15 Corps, operating in Arakan, was removed from the control of Fourteenth Army and placed directly under his command—a step which enabled Headquarters, Fourteenth Army, to move forward and establish itself beside 221 Group on the Imphal plain. With the return of 4 Corps to the field in early November it thus retained command of two army corps, for 33 Corps remained in control of the operations developing against Kalemio. Such was the general organisation of the ground forces when the new campaign fairly opened in November, 1944.

24. In the coastal sector, 15 Corps had begun the preliminaries to its offensive at an early hour and before the end of October, 81 (West African) Division, supplied entirely by air, had crossed into the Kaladan valley from its monsoon quarters at Chiringa and was beginning to advance southwards against some opposition. The main offensive was opened west of the Mayu Hills in mid-December; its purpose was to secure air bases on Akyab and Ramree Islands, from which support could be mounted for future operations in southern Burma, and also by driving the Japanese from the coastal strip west of the Arakan Yomas to liberate the considerable Allied forces they had contained there. It met with even less

resistance than had been anticipated. Forward units of 15 Corps reached Foul Point before Christmas, and an Allied landing on Akyab Island on 3rd January was unopposed. A further landing on Ramree Island on the 21st met with only slight opposition. The core of Japanese resistance was, however, met along the coastal road from Myohaung to Taungup, and a number of amphibious landings which were effected in January and February at various points along the coast provoked fierce fighting (whose issue was beyond doubt due to the heavy and accurate air support that was given), and gradually the enemy was driven towards the two routes leading eastwards from An and Taungup towards the Irrawaddy valley. With the capture of Taungup in the middle of April the coastal campaign was virtually over.

25. The climax of the main battle in central Burma was meanwhile not long delayed. During December the Fourteenth Army struck eastwards, and with the occupation of Wuntho by 4 Corps on the 20th, secured its left flank by laying the basis for a continuous front with the Northern Combat Area Command. The railhead at Ye-U was occupied by 33 Corps on New Year's Day, and the Japanese stronghold at Monywa was finally reduced on the 21st, by when 33 Corps had reached the general line of the Irrawaddy, on which it was evident that the enemy had resolved to make a stand. Bridgeheads had however been secured by 20 Division on the left bank of the river at Thabeikkyin and Singu, and in the great bend of the Irrawaddy the Japanese stoutly defended the approaches to Sagaing on the right bank. In these two sectors, where the contending forces were not separated by the river, bitter fighting continued throughout the second half of January and the first half of February. To the north-east, the Northern Combat Area Command forces were moving southwards across the Shweli valley and towards Lashio; Hsenwi was taken on 19th February, and Namtu on the 23rd.

26. While these events were taking place in the Irrawaddy valley and to the north-east, the main strategy of the campaign was beginning to take shape. 4 Corps was removed from the left flank of the Fourteenth Army as soon as the junction with the Northern Combat Area Command was assured, and with two divisions was given the task of pushing southwards from Kalemio along the Gangaw valley towards Tilin and Pauk. The natural obstacles on this wild route were every bit as great as those prepared by the enemy, who did not appreciate the threat to his left flank that was thus being unfolded. His ignorance of the situation was due to the fact that his reconnaissance aircraft dared not cover the area, and to his tardy realisation of the new mobility of the Allied armies with which air supply endowed them. His defences at Gangaw were overwhelmed on 10th January after an air bombardment to which the Army paid full tribute, and by the 27th the forward units of 4 Corps had reached Pauk. Early in February they established themselves on the right bank of the Irrawaddy below Pakokku. The stage was now set for the crowning blow of the campaign.