

Division, therefore, became so closely involved that the Commander, 4 Corps had to make use of the greater portion of 23 Indian Division, his only reserve, to assist in extricating it. This had serious results as the forces defending Ukhrul were so reduced that the enemy was able to capture the place.

65. I had for many months been anxious to increase the strength of 4 Corps by another division; but the low capacity of the line of communication had prevented its maintenance in that area and I had to be content, therefore, with one extra brigade, 50 Indian Parachute Brigade, which was brought in early in March.

66. With the start of the Japanese offensive, administrative risks had to be taken and General Slim decided to move 5 Indian Division from Arakan to the Imphal—Kohima area. Its move by train and air began on the 19th March. Divisional H.Q., 9 and 123 Indian Infantry Brigades, were moved to Imphal and 161 Indian Infantry Brigade was moved to Dimapur. The move was finished on the 12th April.

The Army Commander also transferred 3 Commando Brigade from Arakan to Silchar early in April, with the rôle of operating along the track to Bishenpur.

Shortly after this, General Slim moved 7 Indian Division from Arakan (two brigades by air and one by rail): one brigade joining 4 Corps by the 18th April, whilst the Division less this brigade was allotted to 33 Corps, the Headquarters of which had been flown from India to the Dimapur area. 2 British Division was moved by air and train from Bombay to Dimapur, the move being completed between the 25th April and the 2nd May. 33 Corps then comprised 2 British Division, 7 Indian Division (less one brigade), one brigade of 5 Indian Division, 23 Long-Range Penetration Brigade, which had been brought forward from India by that time, and the equivalent of a regiment of tanks. It was later reinforced by a lorried infantry brigade.

67. The situation caused me some anxiety during this time and I was very grateful for the valuable assistance which was given me both by the Commander-in-Chief, India, and by General Stilwell. The former, with that unfailing readiness to help which he has always displayed, had put H.Q. 33 Corps, 2 British Division, H.Q. 21 Indian Division (late H.Q. 44 Indian Armoured Division), 268 Indian Lorried Infantry Brigade, two regiment of tanks and other troops at my disposal. General Stilwell undertook the defence of aerodromes and communications in an area agreed on between him and General Slim, deflecting Chinese troops for this purpose.

68. 17 Indian Light Division pulled out of Tiddim on the 17th March and, after hard fighting, in which the enemy suffered heavy losses, succeeded in cutting its way through to Imphal early in April. This Division in spite of many difficulties had succeeded in bringing through most of its transport and vital stores, together with its wounded during the withdrawal up the Tiddim road. The Silchar—Bishenpur track was cut by the enemy's advance.

On the 15th March, 15 Japanese Division crossed the Chindwin at Thaungdut and their 31 Division at Homalin and Tamanthi. 20 Indian Division was withdrawn to better positions north-west of Tamu, astride the road leading to Imphal.

A few days later, the enemy attacked 50 Indian Parachute Brigade at Ukhrul in force and after heavy fighting it was forced to withdraw fighting towards Imphal.

69. Early in April, we were forced to evacuate Kanglatongbi, astride the Dimapur road, about 15 miles north of Imphal, and thus lost the use of our lines of communication between the railhead at Dimapur and Imphal.

#### *4 Corps Operations on the Imphal Front.*

70. The plan of the Commander, 4 Corps on the 10th April was as follows:—

(a) To prevent the enemy gaining access to the Imphal Plain by either the Palel—Imphal or Tiddim—Imphal roads.

(b) To re-establish a force in the Ukhrul area and cut the enemy's line of communication from the east.

(c) To use the largest possible force offensively against either 15 or 33 Japanese Divisions in succession.

71. The successful withdrawal of 17 Indian Light Division and 20 Indian Division in the face of heavy pressure has already been mentioned. 20 Indian Division was now holding positions in depth along the Palel—Tamu road. The gallant delaying action of 50 Indian Parachute Brigade near Ukhrul had proved most useful, as it held up the Japanese advance down the Ukhrul—Imphal road for several days and thus gave time for the recently arrived 5 Indian Division to concentrate in this area.

20 Indian Division was now still further withdrawn in order to release troops for a counter-attack against the Japanese 15 Division, north-east of Imphal.

72. Determined enemy attempts against Imphal from the south and south-east continued, but were successfully withstood by 20 Indian Division. At the end of April, 23 Indian Division on the right, 5 Indian Division (less one brigade) in the centre, and a brigade of 17 Indian Light Division on the left were advancing north and north-east from Imphal, and had moved twenty-three miles up the track running north-east to Ukhrul and ten miles up the main road north to Kohima. (Imphal to Ukhrul is sixty-seven miles as the track goes and Imphal to Kohima is eighty-four miles.)

73. It was apparent from the enemy's efforts that he considered the capture of Imphal to be essential before the monsoon set in. By the first week in May, however, his advance had not only been checked, but forced back in all sectors, except in that of 20 Indian Division. This division had had to give ground slightly in the face of heavy attacks by the Japanese Yamamoto Force, composed of parts of 33 and 15 Japanese Divisions, up the Palel road.

74. Heavy fighting had been in progress in the area of Bishenpur, south-west of Imphal, for some time, and 33 Japanese Division had been pressing strongly against 17 Indian Light