

showed them to be retiring on to their new positions. There was still doubt as to whether they meant to make a main stand on these positions, or merely to delay us on this line. One report received on the 16th December definitely stated that the enemy would not hold Mandalay, but would continue withdrawal southwards. This was a contingency which had to be borne in mind. If the enemy had stood to fight north and west of the Irrawaddy, it was General Slim's plan to destroy him there. But he had always had in his mind an alternative plan which he could employ if the enemy decided—as he did in fact—to fight east of the river. The time had now come to put this alternative into action.

61. The essence of the new plan was a regrouping and redirection of the two Corps. 33 Corps, consisting of 2 British Division, 19 and 20 Indian Divisions, 268 Indian Infantry Brigade and 254 Indian Tank Brigade, was directed to capture the area Monywa-Mandalay, thus holding the Japanese forces by frontal attack. 4 Corps, consisting of 7 and 17 Indian Divisions, 28 (East African) Brigade and 255 Indian Tank Brigade, was to be switched from the left of the Army to the right flank, and, thrusting down the Gangaw valley, was to seize a bridgehead at Pakokku and capture the communications centre of Meiktila. It was this blow at his most vital point that was to be the basis of the enemy's destruction, and it was hoped he would not realise its significance until too late.

By cutting the enemy's L. of C. at Meiktila, a main frontal attack across the Irrawaddy would be avoided, the escape route cut, and, by isolating the northern flank of the Japanese Army, the enemy would be forced to give battle in the Mandalay Plain. 19 Indian Division, transferred to 33 Corps under the regrouping plan, would play an important part. Crossing the Irrawaddy, it would threaten Mandalay from the north prior to 4 Corps' thrust at Meiktila. This, it was hoped, would concentrate the enemy's attention on Mandalay and maintain his main forces in the northern sector. Subsequent exploitation was to be by 33 Corps down the Mandalay-Rangoon railway axis and by 4 Corps down the Irrawaddy Valley.

62. On the 19th December, the above plan was embodied in an Operation Instruction issued to the Commanders of 4 and 33 Corps. In it the Army Commander stated that it was his intention to exploit the rapidity of the enemy's withdrawal to the utmost, and, in conjunction with Northern Combat Area Command, to destroy the Japanese forces in Burma, to advance rapidly to the general line Henzada-Nyaunglebin, and to seize any possibility that might offer of capturing a South Burma port.

63. To achieve this object, formations were to regroup not later than 0001 hours on the 26th December as follows:—

33 Corps	{	2 British Division
		19 Indian Division (ex 4 Corps)
		20 Indian Division
		268 Indian Infantry Brigade
		254 Indian Tank Brigade

4 Corps	{	7 Indian Division
		17 Indian Division (when available, expected the 1st February)
		Lushai Brigade (ex 33 Corps)
		255 Indian Tank Brigade (ex Army reserve)
		11 Cavalry
		28 (East African) Brigade (ex Army reserve)

NOTE.—The above redistribution left 5 Indian Division, which had been withdrawn to rest in the Kohima area, in Army reserve. 17 Indian Division, allotted to 4 Corps, was still in India, but would be available for exploitation. The organization of these two Divisions was being changed; in each of them two brigade groups were being motorised, and one brigade group made air-transportable.

A.L.F.S.E.A. reserve (in India) consisted of 23 Indian Division, but it would be joined by 11 (East African) Division (already withdrawn) and Lushai Brigade (about to be withdrawn).

64. The tasks allotted to 33 Corps were:—

(a) To capture or construct airfields in the Ye-U—Shwebo areas.

(b) To capture Monywa.

(c) To capture Mandalay.

(d) To be prepared to advance on the general axis Mandalay-Nyaunglebin.

NOTE.—Up to this date, 33 Corps had been acting on an Instruction issued on the 1st October which directed them to advance eastwards and capture the Ye-U area, with the object of establishing airstrips.

65. The tasks allotted to 4 Corps were:—

(a) To capture Pakokku.

(b) To seize a bridgehead across the Irrawaddy.

(c) To capture Meiktila and the Meiktila group of airfields.

(d) To be prepared to advance southwards on the general axis Myingyan-Henzada.

NOTE.—The previous Instruction to 4 Corps, dated the 7th December, directed its concentration in the Ye-U—Shwebo area by the 15th February at the latest (see paragraph 32).

66. This Instruction also laid down that the Kalemmyo-Gangaw-Pakokku road would be constructed to a standard sufficient only to pass 4 Corps through, and that it would not be maintained thereafter. The Kalewa—Ye-U—Shwebo road was to be constructed to a fair-weather standard only, since time and the available engineer and transport resources would allow no more.

With regard to administration, the allocation of air supply lift was laid down (I shall refer later in this Despatch to the actual tonnage allotments), and the following important instructions were given:—

(a) Temporary airstrips were to be constructed every 50 miles, capable of taking C-46 aircraft.

(b) Formations, when beyond maintenance distance from Indiangyi, were to move by march route, owing to the shortage of available air-lift and the consequent need for the maximum economy in motor fuel.

(c) The potentialities of the Chindwin River as a supply-carrying L. of C. were to be exploited to the utmost, since we were not able to construct an all-weather road route from Kalewa to Shwebo.