

forced to leave that country. General Lin Wei agreed:—

(a) That the bulk of the Chinese Fifth Army should withdraw north via Shwebo, and

(b) That it would be better that no Imperial Forces should withdraw towards Lashio and that the tanks should be employed for the battle of Mandalay on the most suitable ground, which was north of the Irrawaddy towards Shwebo.

On the 22nd April an outline of the new plan was sent by liaison officer to the Headquarters 1 Burcorps and, on the 23rd April, Operation Instruction No. 46, the contents of which had been agreed by General Stilwell's staff at Maymyo, was issued.

45. *Situation North of Yenangyaung.*—Before explaining in detail the new plan for a withdrawal north of Mandalay it is necessary to return to the situation of 1 Burcorps north of Yenangyaung. On the 20th April, the day following my agreement with General Stilwell to undertake offensive operations in this area, the dispositions of 1 Burcorps were as follows:—

17 Division holding Taungdwingyi-Natmauk.

7 Armoured Brigade under orders to move to the Meiktila area.

38 Chinese Division under command 1 Burcorps with—

113 Regiment and two battalions 112 Regiment area Yenangyaung.

114 Regiment under orders to move from Mandalay to Taungtha.

1 Burma Division reorganising in the area of Mount Popa. This Division had lost, in the fighting at Yenangyaung, about 20 per cent. of its personnel, two Bofors, four 3.7 howitzers, four 25 pounders, most of its 3-in. mortars and nearly all its M.T. The Division was not in a fit condition to fight for some days.

Efforts were being made to organise as rapidly as possible the move of the 200 Chinese Division from the Meiktila-Thazi area to Kyaukpadaung and one regiment of the 22 Division to Natmauk. Owing, however, to the lack of transport and to the difficulty of co-ordinating plans with the Chinese Fifth Army, it appeared improbable that the force could be concentrated and ready for offensive action before the morning of the 22nd April at the earliest.

46. On the 21st April the seriousness of the situation in the Shan States brought about the abandonment of the projected offensive against the Japanese 33 Division in the Yenangyaung area. The 200 Chinese Division was ordered by General Stilwell to move to Kalaw and the 22 Chinese Division to concentrate in the Thazi area. In these circumstances it became a matter of supreme importance to hold securely the centres of communication south of Mandalay. Accordingly the following moves were ordered by 1 Burcorps:—

38 Chinese Division to concentrate at Kyaukpadaung.

1 Burma Division to be prepared to move to Taungtha.

17 Division to withdraw from Taungdwingyi and later from Natmauk to positions north west and west of Meiktila at Mahlaing and Zayetkon.

7 Armoured Brigade to Meiktila under command of General Lo, who now took over command of the Chinese forces on the Pyawbwe front, General Tu having moved with the 200 Division to Kalaw.

47. *The New Plan.*—The plan contained in Operation Instruction No. 46 envisaged the following dispositions north of the Irrawaddy:—

*West of the River Mu.*—1 Burcorps less the 7 Armoured Brigade with the 1 Burma Division astride the River Chindwin and a strong detachment covering the approach to Kalewa via the Myittha valley.

*Between the River Mu and the Northern Reach of the Irrawaddy.*—38 Chinese Division and the 7 Armoured Brigade.

*In and South of Mandalay and holding the Crossings over the River Myitnge.*—22, 28 and 96 Chinese Divisions.

It will be realised that a withdrawal from the Meiktila area would uncover the communications with Mandalay of any Chinese forces in the area Kalaw-Taunggyi and would prevent their withdrawal via Mandalay. The plan therefore was for all Chinese forces east of the railway Mandalay-Pyawbwe to move towards Lashio. The situation was very delicate at this time and it was impossible to issue a hard and fast plan for any further withdrawal since no decision could be made in the existing situation as to whether the 22, 28 and 96 Chinese Divisions would withdraw to the north or whether they would fall back on Lashio.

48. I must emphasise here that I had no intention of withdrawing north of the Irrawaddy unless forced to give up Kyaukpadaung and Meiktila and, for the defence of these areas, I had grouped my forces as follows:—

(a) Under command of General Lo (Chinese C.-in-C.).—22 Division, 96 Division and the 7 Armoured Brigade (for the defence of the area Meiktila-Thazi-Pyawbwe).

(b) Under the command of Lieut.-General Slim, 1 Burcorps—17 Division, 1 Burma Division, 38 Chinese Division.

28 Chinese Division (less one regiment not yet arrived) was preparing the defences of Mandalay.

I had to consider the dangerous bottleneck of Mandalay through which run the approaches to the Ava Bridge, the only bridge over the Irrawaddy. These approaches were very vulnerable to air attack. I was determined not to allow my forces to be pushed into the loop of the Irrawaddy below Mandalay and be forced to fight with this obstacle at their backs. In order to avoid this and also to avoid undue congestion in the approaches to the Ava Bridge, I had decided that the moment to order the withdrawal would be when my advanced forces had to leave the Meiktila area. I had also arranged earlier in the month for preparations to be put in hand for the construction of ferries over both the Irrawaddy and the Myitnge Rivers and of the approaches thereto in order to eliminate the bottleneck as far as possible.

PART V.—THE JAPANESE BREAK-THROUGH IN THE SHAN STATES AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ALLIED FORCES NORTH OF MANDALAY.

49. *Decision to withdraw North of Mandalay.* The situation in the Shan States