

appear about the middle of March, made landing hazardous, and it was obvious that the enemy had by now made full preparations to defend all landing places. General Irwin recommended that we should prepare defensive positions and give up the attempt to clear the Mayu peninsula. I refused to accept this recommendation and to take up a defensive attitude without first obtaining a marked success over the enemy, so that the troops should be confident of their ability to beat the Japanese. I directed General Irwin to use the 6th Brigade (British) of four battalions, which had been held at Chittagong in readiness for the attack on Akyab, to assault the Donbaik position in conjunction with the 71st Indian Brigade. My intention was that the attack should be delivered in great strength and depth with the object of swamping the Japanese positions.

8. Meanwhile the Japanese began a counter offensive, directed in the first instance against our eastern flank on the Kaladan river. Two small columns had moved into the Kaladan valley at the time of our advance on Rathedaung. One column, consisting of a battalion of Indian infantry from the 123rd Brigade, moved from the Mayu valley by a track across the hills into the Kaladan valley; the other, consisting of two companies of Tripura Rifles (State Forces), came down the valley from the north. Our forces had occupied Kyauktaw by the time of the Japanese attack. The enemy appears partly to have come up the Kaladan river from Akyab and partly to have infiltrated through the hills from Pakokku on the Irrawaddy. They employed their usual enveloping tactics against communications and forced the battalion of the 123rd Brigade to withdraw westward across the hills with some loss, and the Tripura Rifles to retreat northwards up the valley. The enemy followed up this success by crossing the hills and attacking the communications of 123rd Brigade opposite Rathedaung. After some heavy fighting, the 123rd Brigade, which had been closely engaged for three months, was relieved by the 55th Brigade and withdrew to Buthidaung.

9. The attack of the 6th Brigade on the Donbaik position took place on March 18th and failed. The troops succeeded in advancing some distance into the enemy defences, but were unable to deal with the enemy's underground strong points, which remained in action behind our forward troops; while the enemy guns, mortars and machine-guns, concealed in the jungle, carried on firing on our troops which had penetrated the line quite regardless of their own troops which were still holding out. Our forward troops were eventually all killed or compelled to withdraw. The attack was made with great dash and determination but was not carried out in the strength or depth that I had considered necessary to overrun the enemy position. The losses of the attacking troops were heavy, especially in officers.

10. Meanwhile the 55th Brigade opposite Rathedaung was attacked in flank and rear and cut off from Buthidaung on March 17th. By a counter-attack and with the assistance of 71st Brigade it succeeded in extricating itself from a dangerous position but lost some equipment and a considerable number of

animals. East of the Mayu river we were now forced back to a position covering Buthidaung.

The enemy then began similar infiltration tactics against our troops west of the Mayu range, and at Indin on April 5th overran the headquarters of the 6th Brigade. There was heavy fighting here, and severe casualties were inflicted on the enemy in counter-attacks; but by the middle of April we had withdrawn on this flank to positions covering Maungdaw.

11. By the end of March, the 26th Division had taken over the greater part of the front, most of the 14th Division being withdrawn further north to rest. Some of the troops were tired and many units were weak through battle casualties and disease; reinforcements took some time to settle down to the abnormal conditions of jungle fighting. But in view of our command of the air I still hoped we could regain the initiative. I accordingly issued the instructions to Eastern Army which are given in Appendix B. They were to the effect that positions to cover the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road, the Maungdaw air-field and the mouth of the Naf river were to be held for the monsoon period in as great depth as possible, and that we were meanwhile to regain the initiative by offensive action on both sides of the Mayu river.

12. Shortly afterwards, in the middle of April, I was summoned to the United Kingdom to discuss plans for the winter of 1943-44 (see paragraph 46 below). During the first three months of 1943 I had visited the Eastern front on a number of occasions and had kept in close personal touch with Commanders and operations. During the remainder of the period under review, I was in the United Kingdom or U.S.A. and in touch only by long-range telegraph reports.

13. We failed to regain the initiative, and in fact lost our positions at Maungdaw and Buthidaung. Japanese forces continued their infiltration tactics through the thick jungle along the spine of the Mayu ridge; and by early May established themselves with a strength of at least two battalions on the road between Maungdaw and Buthidaung and destroyed a bridge. All attempts to dislodge them failed, so that it was necessary, on May 7th, to withdraw the force from Buthidaung by the Ngakyedauk Pass to the west of the Mayu ridge south of Bawli Bazaar. The movement was carried out without interference by the enemy; but a quantity of transport which could not be removed had to be destroyed.

14. The enemy continued to infiltrate against our communications; and it was finally decided to take up positions further north, abandoning Maungdaw, although it had been developed as an advanced base since its capture in December, and its loss involved the destruction of considerable quantities of stores. An attempt might have been made to hold and maintain it by means of the Naf river; but in view of the tired state of the troops and their lack of jungle training the attempt was not judged advisable. By the start of the monsoon, our forces in Arakan were back approximately in the positions from which the advance had begun five months earlier. The enemy, who was also obviously suffering,