

130. Before leaving this phase of operations, it is interesting at this point to review the achievements of 33 Corps. By this means it is possible to see the magnitude of the cumulative defeat of the Japanese forces. On the 3rd April, 1944, Headquarters, 33 Corps, had opened at Jorhat and had proceeded at once to organize the operations which led to the relief of Kohima. Exactly one year later, the troops comprising this Corps were able to claim the following successes: Japanese killed (and actually counted) 19,547, prisoners taken 720, guns captured or destroyed 252. The following advances had taken place: on the right 597 miles, in the centre 549 miles, on the left 645 miles. The Japanese had been cleared from an area of 35,000 square miles. At least 11,000 inhabited localities had been liberated, including the city of Mandalay.

SECTION IX (paras. 131-158) OPERATIONS IN ARAKAN

General remarks: Topography: The 15 Indian Corps plan: The Divisional plans: Opening stages of the offensive: The advance to Foul Point: Operations inland and in the Kaladan Valley.

131. I think that this is the appropriate place to turn from Fourteenth Army to the operations of 15 Indian Corps in Arakan. The object of these operations has already been given (paragraph 12), as has the outline of the plan (paragraph 14). Some reference has been made also to the progress there in November and December (paragraph 49). In this and the two ensuing sections, I propose to describe in more detail these plans and operations, showing how, from first being directed at the release of formations for post-monsoon operations against Rangoon, they developed so that their new object became the assistance of Fourteenth Army to capture Rangoon before the monsoon, by containing enemy forces, establishing air supply bases and, finally, by mounting an ancillary seaborne operation against Rangoon itself.

132. In the Arakan sector, we were faced with peculiar difficulties. The first was topographical. The country entirely favoured the Japanese. The tangled, jungle-clad mountains run down to a narrow coastal strip of paddy or mangrove swamp, which is intersected by unfordable tidal creeks. These creeks or "chaungs" present problems which few who have not experienced them can imagine. They are mostly bordered by mangrove forest to a considerable depth on each side, which makes landing altogether impossible except at the extremely rare landing places, of whose importance the enemy was obviously aware. These landing places, however, are only short stretches of muddy bank. The chaungs vary a very great deal in size, some being arms of the sea, while others are narrow and winding streams, hedged in both sides by the mangrove forest. In the latter case visibility is only to the next bend in the chaung. Near the sea, tidal conditions add to the difficulties.

North of Akyab a few beaches can be found, but south to beyond Taungup, the mangrove swamp conditions are at their worst.

133. The other great difficulty is the weather, which is a major strategic factor. The exceptional severity of the monsoon in Arakan is

apparent when one realises that the rainfall is over fifty inches during the months of July and August. During June and September the rainfall varies between fifteen and twenty inches for the former and between twenty and thirty inches for the latter month. This has two main effects. Movement on land is more or less impossible except between mid-December, when the ground dries out, and the breaking of the monsoon about mid-May, or a little earlier. Not only do the waterways rise and flood, but the paddy fields, which form most of the open country are under water and impassable. The impracticability of the employment of armour is obvious, and the absence of all-weather roads makes a land of L. of C. impossible during the rains. The second effect of the monsoon is that sea conditions prevent the use of landing craft except in virtually inland waterways. The number of days on which landing is impossible becomes progressively greater during April, and it will be seen later how the Japanese in fact anticipated no landings from the open sea after mid-April, until the monsoon was over.

134. Fortunately we had two advantages which enabled us decisively to overcome both the natural difficulties and the Japanese. We had secured complete command of the sea and the air and were thus able to utilise to the full the mobility conferred by this supremacy. Thus although the country favoured the land defence, we were in a position to force the enemy to fight on ground of our own choosing and to make ourselves independent, to a great extent, of overland Ls. of C. The campaign therefore hinged upon a series of combined operations, rapidly and efficiently mounted by a combined headquarters. Excellent team-work was established between Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Christison, commanding 15 Indian Corps, Rear-Admiral Martin, commanding a naval force consisting, in part, of his own landing craft of Force "W", which was arriving from England, and a scratch force of landing craft from India, and Air Commodore (later Air Vice-Marshal) the Earl of Bandon, commanding 224 Group, R.A.F. The planning and execution by these Commanders and their staffs was excellent. In conjunction with these amphibious operations, the operations further inland by 81 and 82 (West African) Divisions fulfilled a very important rôle. Fighting under very arduous conditions, they kept the enemy spread over a wide front, containing the equivalent of about three Japanese regiments, and, by preventing the enemy from concentrating more troops in the coastal sector, materially assisted the speed of operations there.

135. To recapitulate what has been said in the early paragraphs of this Despatch, the primary object of the Arakan campaign was to liquidate the very unsatisfactory position which then existed. We had four divisions contained there by a very much inferior enemy force, which was able to threaten to outflank our positions by an advance up the Kaladan Valley. By a limited offensive to capture Akyab, Myebon and Minbya, we would eliminate this threat, and, by the coming monsoon, be enabled to reduce our garrison to about four brigades. The remaining formations could be withdrawn for post-monsoon operations, which at that time (November, 1944) were visualised as including an amphibious and airborne assault on Rangoon.