

(c) Containing and killing Japanese in the Kabaw Valley and Atwin Yomas.

(d) Pushing forces across the Chindwin, if the Long-Range Penetration Brigades created a favourable situation.

57. On the 13th January, patrols reported considerable enemy activity east of the Chindwin, between Sittaung and Paungbyin, and also east of Homalin, some forty miles further up the river. This information, which supplemented previous air reconnaissance reports, indicated that the enemy might be preparing for an offensive.

58. On the 17th January, we attacked enemy positions at Kyaukchaw, eighteen miles south-east of Tamu in the Atwin Yomas, and there were other small operations in the same area during the month.

59. Throughout January and February, 17 Indian Light Division was continually engaged with the enemy in the Tiddim area; attack and counter-attack following each other in quick succession.

The Japanese Offensive against Imphal and Kohima.

60. During February, it became steadily more evident that the Japanese were preparing for an offensive across the Chindwin and from the area about Fort White against 17 Indian Light Division. The general situation remained unchanged until the 8th March, when the anticipated Japanese offensive was launched. This began with two main advances, one up the west bank of the Manipur River, the other northwards up the Kabaw Valley, from which Japanese columns moved westwards to cut the Imphal—Tiddim road. It was also apparent, from the enemy's dispositions, that he would probably launch an offensive farther north from the Thaugdut—Homalin area against Tamu, Ukhrul and Kohima.

61. Our dispositions at the beginning of March were:—

50 Indian Parachute Brigade: Kohima. This Brigade (less one battalion) had been flown in from India as a reinforcement to 4 Corps early in March.

23 Indian Division: One brigade in the Ukhrul area; the remainder south and south-east of Imphal.

20 Indian Division: On the Tamu road and in the Kabaw Valley.

17 Indian Light Division (two brigades only): Tiddim area.

62. On the 7th March, I had sent an instruction to the Commander, Fourteenth Army, of which the following were the main points:—

(a) A warning that the impending Japanese offensive against 4 Corps' area would probably be on a considerably larger scale than anything the enemy had yet attempted in Burma.

(b) An indication of the tactical difficulties of the situation, due to the fundamental weakness of our line of communication being parallel to the enemy's front along the Chindwin River.

(c) The strategical importance of the Imphal Plain: (i) as a base for the maintenance and operation of our air and land

forces, and (ii) its value to the Japanese as a base for attacks against the Surma Valley in Eastern Bengal and our Assam lines of communication. Attacks against Bengal would have an adverse and widespread moral effect; while interruption of the Assam lines of communication would seriously jeopardise both the Sino-American operations based on Ledo and the air ferry route to China. I pointed out that the enemy's effort without control of the Imphal Plain, would probably have to be confined to raids, owing to the indifferent communications and the paucity of food supplies in the hill tracts.

(d) The security of the Imphal Plain was his primary task.

(e) A confirmation of the authority I had recently given General Slim verbally that he might, if necessary, give ground in the Chin Hills and the Kabaw Valley. In this event, I stated he would be justified in using Long-Range Penetration forces to operate boldly against the enemy's flanks and communications.

(f) I stated that, apart from 25 Indian Division, Long-Range Penetration Brigades, and 50 Indian Parachute Brigade, immediate reinforcements for 4 Corps must come from Fourteenth Army sources, and that, therefore, preparations should be made for the quickest possible moves of troops to reinforce 4 Corps, although this might (i) limit the depth of our advance in Arakan, (ii) cause troops to be retained in Arakan longer than desirable and (iii) interfere with intended reliefs. 77 and 111 Long-Range Penetration Brigades were already in the Fourteenth Army area; 16 Long-Range Penetration Brigade was marching into North Burma, 14 and 23 Long-Range Penetration Brigades, and 3 (West African) Long-Range Penetration Brigade, were about to move into Fourteenth Army's area from India. I promised to investigate whether the projected moves of 14 and 23 Long-Range Penetration Brigades could be accelerated.

63. The relative dispositions of our own troops and those of the enemy and the topography of the country all combined to facilitate infiltration, which is the basis of Japanese tactics in fighting in close country. General Slim, therefore, decided very rightly, that to leave 17 Indian Light Division at Tiddim, and 20 Indian Division east and south of Tamu would not only give the Japanese excellent opportunities of cutting off these two Divisions, but would imperil the defence of the Imphal Plain which was his primary task.

He also appreciated that, if he could engage the Japanese forces in the neighbourhood of the Imphal Plain, he would impose upon them all the difficulties and disadvantages of a long line of communication over difficult country and preserve to himself the advantages of a short line of communication.

64. The G.O.C.-in-C. 4 Corps gave instructions to Commander, 17 Indian Light Division, that he was to withdraw if his line of communication was seriously threatened. The Commander, 17 Indian Light Division, not finding himself unduly pressed frontally, and not realising the extent to which the enemy were infiltrating behind him, postponed his retirement somewhat too long. 17 Indian Light