

command I should have liked to take his Division with me to India but in the circumstances this was impossible.

69. *Description of Route.*—The problem now facing my force cannot be appreciated without some knowledge of the road conditions between Ye-U and Kalewa. This road was nothing more than a sandy track running from Ye-U via Kaduma, Pyingyaing and Thetkeyyin to Shwegyin, eight miles south of Kalewa. It had been the intention to continue the road from Thetkeyyin to a point opposite Kalewa but, owing to the difficulties of the last part of this route, which required a lot of rock blasting, this had not been possible and it was the lack of this last twelve miles of road, over which there was nothing more than a footpath, which caused the abandonment of the major portion of the M.T. and all tanks. The track from Ye-U passed through innumerable chaungs or nullahs, some of which were dry and sandy and some of which were wet. Between Pyingyaing and Thetkeyyin there was a difficult hill section with many rickety bridges constructed only of brushwood or bamboo. Anyone seeing this track for the first time would find it difficult to imagine how a fully mechanised force could possibly move over it. The casualties to M.T. were heavy and the difficulties were much accentuated by the need to return empty lorries from Shwegyin in order to ferry back more troops and wounded. As the operations progressed, the road was organised into sections for two-way and one-way traffic and the work of the Field Engineering units very much improved conditions in the later stages of the withdrawal to Shwegyin.

70. From Shwegyin all troops, motor vehicles and guns had to be transported to Kalewa by steamer. There were six steamers, the capacity of each being 600 to 700 men but only two lorries and two Jeeps. A special flat had to be constructed for taking vehicles, but owing to difficulties of embarkation from the beach at Shwegyin, full use could not be made of this method of transport. As a result of the low vehicle capacity of the ships, the transport problem, when units reached Kalewa, was acute. There was barely enough transport to carry essential unit equipment and ammunition and to evacuate the wounded. Fortunately the establishment of a system of staging camps stocked with supplies eliminated the necessity for units to carry rations. The track to a point opposite Kalewa was quite passable for infantry and pack animals and, in the early stages of the withdrawal, all refugees moved by this route, crossing the Chindwin to Kalewa in country boats.

71. As will have been seen from previous paragraphs, the withdrawal to Kalewa was forced on me before the stocking of the Ye-U road was finished. Nevertheless, the heroic efforts of the Administrative Staff and the drastic action which was taken to make transport available, enabled the distribution of stocks to be completed after the withdrawal had commenced. Supplies were back-loaded to the fullest possible extent and, although the force was placed on half rations on the 4th May, there was never any real shortage of supplies.

72. The road northwards from Kalemyo to Tamu was no more than a dirt track through the jungle and once the rains set in, which

might take place at any time about the 15th May, this track would become impassable to M.T. I felt, therefore, that my operations were now as much a race with the weather as with the Japanese and as much a fight against nature as against the enemy.

Nevertheless, I had other problems to consider. There was a large number of refugees on the road west of Ye-U and I was not prepared to abandon them either to the enemy or to possible molestation by the local population. There was also the problem of clearing from Shwegyin a large number of Army Troops and followers before the fighting formations, and I therefore ordered the Commander 1 Burcorps to delay at this stage the withdrawal of his rear guard. Fortunately, the enemy did not follow up closely on the road from Ye-U and, following a brush between the 7 Armoured Brigade and some enemy tanks north of Budalin on the 5th May, there was no further contact for some days.

73. On the 4th May, Commander 1 Burcorps proposed to withdraw one infantry brigade by the route Pyingyaing-Indaw-Pantha for the protection of his left flank.

As this would reduce the shipping problem at Shwegyin I agreed to the proposal and arranged for necessary supplies to be moved by steamer to Pantha.

A few days later, Commander 1 Burcorps also arranged that when the 48 Infantry Brigade, forming the rear guard, reached Shwegyin it would proceed thence by steamer to Sittaung. This plan eased the transport problem on the road from Kalewa to Tamu.

74. *The Fight at Shwegyin.* The threat of enemy air attack on river craft reduced the capacity of the steamer service between Shwegyin and Kalewa during the hours of daylight. The crews were nervous and guards were placed on all ships to prevent any attempt at voluntary evacuation. Fortunately, however, the steamer service was singularly free from air attack. Except for bombing raids on the boom on the 5th May, and at Shwegyin on the evening of 7th May, no air attacks of any importance took place.

On the morning of the 10th May an enemy force of approximately one battalion with mortars, attacked the covering force at Shwegyin. It subsequently transpired that this force had moved upstream in landing craft as soon as the detachment at Maukkadaw had withdrawn and had landed at Kywe just south of Shwegyin. There was fighting all day but, in spite of this, embarkation continued. During the late afternoon, the rear guard, the 48 Infantry Brigade, counter attacked, driving off the Japanese. Contact was then lost. Commander 1 Burcorps now decided that ferrying by steamer from Shwegyin was no longer practicable. There remained in Shwegyin at this time:—

Advance Headquarters 17 Division, 48 Infantry Brigade, 1/9 R. Jats, majority of the 7 Armoured Brigade, animal transport of 1 Burma and 17 Divisions.

Commander 1 Burcorps ordered all remaining guns, tanks and motor vehicles to be destroyed and personnel to move by the track to the ferry opposite Kalewa. The 48 Infantry Brigade, with under command 1/9 Jats and 2 D.W.R., finding guards on the ships, were embarked in