

prior to the monsoon, for the possible continued maintenance of Fourteenth Army. This was absolutely essential, since the land communications would prove quite inadequate during the rains, and I could not gamble, at this stage, on capturing a South Burma port and establishing maintenance from it. The interests of 15 Indian Corps had to be subordinated to those of Fourteenth Army, who were playing for high stakes. I was reluctantly obliged to reduce the air supply lift allotted to 15 Indian Corps from 130 to 30 tons per day, though I realised that this meant the abandonment of General Christison's plan—which was going well—for the encirclement of 54 Japanese Division. Orders had, therefore, to be issued to all three brigades of 82 (West African) Division to break contact and make for the An—Tamandu road; but, as will appear later, this did not mean that the Japanese in the An area would be left unmolested.

205. In accordance with the policy for easing the maintenance situation, 25 Indian Division was now directed to withdraw to Akyab by the end of the month (March). 22 (East African) Brigade, from Ramree, was to relieve 53 Brigade at Ru-Ywa, at once, but, until the Forward Maintenance Area at Tamandu was firmly established, 74 Brigade was to remain in the area under command of 82 (West African) Division.

206. The achievements of 25 Indian Division are well summarized in the farewell order issued to this formation by the Commander, 15 Indian Corps, on their departure:—

“You have to your credit the clearance from the Mayu Peninsula of the famous 55 Japanese Division and the capture of Akyab and clearance of the surrounding districts, the Myebon operations and the surprise landing and resultant decisive battle of the whole campaign—Kangaw. You finished off your campaign to clear the Northern and Central Arakan of the Japanese 54 Division by the brilliantly executed landing at Ru-Ywa—leading to your final capture of the enemy's base at Tamandu.

Throughout these operations you have shown magnificent fighting qualities and the highest morale. You have to your credit the successful accomplishment of probably the most difficult combined operations any British force has ever attempted.

You have inflicted 8,300 casualties on the Japanese and taken 37 guns.”

207. On the 13th March, naval forces under the command of Captain E. T. Cooper, R.N., transported 4 Brigade of 26 Indian Division from Kyaukpyu and landed it unopposed due east of the village of Letpan, 36 miles south of Ru-Ywa. The landing was supported by naval gunfire from the ROEBUCK, ESKIMO, CAUVERY and JUMNA. This final landing on the Arakan coast was effected in order to cut the main road behind the enemy's forward troops. It brought us nearer Taungup and the western entrance to the last pass across the Yomas into the Irrawaddy Valley. The advance of 4 Brigade down the road axis towards Taungup was rapid, despite considerable opposition, until it was held up, on the 25th March, by hill positions three miles south of

the Tanlwe Chaung, about five miles from Taungup.

208. In the meantime, the enemy had succeeded in establishing a strong block on the Tamandu—An road, to the west of 2 (West African) Brigade, and the supply situation of this Brigade was, for some days, critical. The road was, however, reopened on the 26th March. 2 Brigade was ordered to withdraw west to the Tamandu area, while 1 (West African) Brigade, now the most easterly troops on the An road, readjusted their dispositions east of Letmauk (seven miles east of Tamandu). On the 17th March, 22 (East African) Brigade was concentrated at Ru-Ywa and assumed charge of that area. It was then ordered to move south in support of 4 Brigade of 26 Indian Division, which was advancing towards Taungup. By the 23rd March, forward troops had reached the north bank of the An Chaung at Kywegu, meeting only slight opposition and, by the end of the month, they had reached Letpan.

209. The time had now arrived, in the beginning of April, to relieve 26 Indian Division, as the continuation of the phasing out of 15 Indian Corps. 36 and 71 Brigades had remained on Ramree Island and thus it remained only to relieve 4 Brigade in the Taungup area. 25 Indian Division had already been withdrawn, and so there remained on the mainland, in addition to 4 Indian Brigade, only 82 (West African) Division, disposed between Tamandu and Letmauk (where 1 (West African) Brigade was in contact with the enemy), and 22 (East African) Brigade, which was advancing south from Letpan. In the Irrawaddy sector, the rapid advance of Fourteenth Army was bringing it appreciably closer to Minbu, at the eastern end of the An—Minbu road. It was, therefore, clearly the responsibility of 15 Indian Corps to prevent the Japanese forces about An withdrawing east to oppose Fourteenth Army. Since, without air supply, it would not be possible to despatch a column to block the enemy's escape route east of An, the best alternative was to maintain an offensive force before An, whose rôle would be to keep the enemy facing west, without actually driving him from his present positions. This task was allotted to 1 (West African) Brigade. The Japanese appeared remarkably sensitive to the activities of this force and the ruse was entirely successful. This new operation up the An road released 2 and 4 (West African) Brigades. 2 Brigade was immediately ordered south to relieve 4 Indian Brigade, thus freeing this formation to rejoin 26 Indian Division on Ramree prior to its departure for India. 4 (West African) Brigade was used to secure the base at Tamandu, and, when this became no longer necessary, it too was transferred to Taungup.

210. During the second week in April, it seemed evident that the Japanese were thinning out north and north-east of Taungup. Reported withdrawals of their troops between Taungup and Sandoway into the hills east of Taungup also indicated that the enemy were now more concerned with preventing our advance across the Yomas, than in maintaining their defence of the coast further south. Patrols of 4 Indian Brigade found Taungup deserted on the 15th April. This Brigade was relieved