

swiftly overcome and the whole area cleared. Surprise had been complete. By the evening of the 22nd, our leading tanks and infantry were in Oktwin, eight miles to the south, where they captured a loaded train (complete with two engines) which was on the point of departure. The importance of Toungoo to us lay in its airfields from which fighters could operate over Rangoon, distant 166 miles. Since our captures in Toungoo fortunately included an I.N.A. division (some 3,000 strong), there was no shortage of labour to get the air-strips into running order. In the 21 days of continuous fighting since 4 Corps broke out from Meiktila, it had advanced 170 miles and killed 4,800 Japanese, of which 1,677 had been accounted for by 5 Indian Division between the 12th and 22nd April. These were casualties actually counted on the ground; the total enemy killed considerably exceeded this figure, which does not include the many losses inflicted by our armour in quick-moving tank actions, and by our aircraft.

244. Continuing their dash south, 5 Indian Division's armoured column on the 24th April found the Pyu Chaung, 30 miles south of Toungoo, held and the bridge destroyed. Nevertheless, by the 25th, a crossing had been effected and Pyu succumbed to an artillery concentration. The progress of 161 Brigade was delayed by the bridge two miles south of Toungoo being washed away, necessitating the construction of a 180-foot Bailey, which was completed early on the 25th. The Brigade then pushed forward through Pyu in hot pursuit of our armour which, on the night 25th-26th, had reached Milestone 128 from Rangoon, 29 miles north of Nyaunglebin. Incidentally, 17 Indian Division had been scheduled to pass through 5 Indian Division on the 24th April, and indignation swept the former when it was learnt that the latter had invaded what should have been 17 Indian Division's area of operations. I mention this small point as it illustrates the fine aggressive spirit which permeated not only 4 Corps, but the whole of Fourteenth Army in this campaign.

245. The Japanese Air Force was so overwhelmed by the Allied Air Forces at this time, and indeed throughout the whole Burma campaign, that its existence is apt to be overlooked. Nevertheless, the enemy did on occasions attempt to delay the onward rush of 4 Corps. On the 24th April, for example, twelve Oscar fighter-bombers twice bombed and strafed the Tennant and Kalaywa airfields north of Toungoo, and then attacked the armoured column to the south. Our casualties in these attacks were light, whereas the hostile aircraft were intercepted by Spitfires and lost half their number.

246. The loss of Toungoo must have convinced General Kimura that the situation was critical. There is no doubt, evidence later showed, that the Japanese Commander intended as a last resort to hold a line through Toungoo and Prome until the coming of the monsoon forced us to ease the pressure of our offensive. Our break-through at Toungoo destroyed this last hope. Whether he intended to hold Rangoon, or whether he meant to withdraw the remnants of his forces across the Sittang, it was essential that the road and railway through Pegu—the only land communica-

tions link between Rangoon and Moulmein—should be kept open. Thus the defence of Pegu now became absolutely vital. Kimura had apparently no hope of retaking Toungoo itself, but he directed 15 Japanese Division to accelerate its move west from Mawchi and block the Toungoo—Mawchi road at the point where it enters the hills. The object was two-fold. First, this threat to 4 Corps might delay its advance and cause it to divert troops; secondly, this position would protect the flank of those elements of 33 Japanese Army still north of Mawchi, who were retreating south. The Japanese Commander's next step was to concentrate every available man for the defence of Pegu. 24 Independent Mixed Brigade was rushed north from Moulmein to the Pegu—Mokpalin area. He also formed two new Mixed Brigades from the Rangoon garrison, which were largely composed of administrative and naval personnel. The Rangoon Anti-Aircraft Command, the largest in Burma, provided the guns for this scratch force, all its batteries being utilised for this purpose. These two brigades were moved up to Pegu on 27th April with orders "To destroy the enemy north of Payagyi and Waw", which lie 10 and 15 miles north and north-west of Pegu respectively. While this was going on, the major portion of the small detachments guarding the mouth of the Rangoon River were moved back into Rangoon "To cover demolitions". With effect from the 28th April, therefore, Rangoon was practically denuded of troops, except for 5,000 I.N.A.

247. I must make it clear however that it was not until the 1st May that I received any indication that Rangoon was going to be evacuated, and it was only after 15 Indian Corps landed that it became certain. This was another example of how poor our Intelligence was in comparison with the European theatre and how, so often, we were virtually fighting in the dark. It was known that Pegu was being reinforced at the expense of Rangoon, but it was always considered that Rangoon itself would be the centre of a desperate resistance. I need not emphasise how serious the delay caused by such resistance would have been.

248. On the 24th April, General Kimura and his Headquarters retired to Moulmein. They were accompanied by Ba Maw and several ministers of his puppet Government. With them went Subhas Chandra Bose—the Commander-in-Chief of the "Indian National Army"—leaving behind him several thousand of his troops, with orders to fight to the last. They surrendered directly we reached Rangoon, thereby easing our labour problem.

249. 19 Indian Division, following up 5 and 17 Indian Divisions, took over the Toungoo area on the 26th April, the actual locations of its brigades on this date being 98 Brigade in Toungoo itself, 62 Brigade at Lewe airfield, and 64 Brigade back in Meiktila. 98 Brigade immediately began operations to clear the leading elements of 15 Japanese Division east of Toungoo, and our artillery engaged the enemy guns shelling Toungoo. The next week was spent in mopping up scattered parties of the enemy in the vicinity; on the 29th April, for example, 200 Japanese were surrounded and killed just south-west of the Lewe airfield, and a further 150 ten miles south-west of Toungoo. Although it falls outside the period