

38. On the 16th February, 36 British Division began to relieve 26 Indian Division to enable it to concentrate east of the Mayu Range.

39. By the 20th February, the shortage of food and ammunition, severe casualties and lack of any tactical success began to have their effect upon the Japanese forces, and they began to try to escape, at first in dribbles and then in larger parties. Many of them failed to run the gauntlet and were wiped out. By the 24th February the Ngakyedauk Pass had been re-opened and the Japanese offensive, heralded as the beginning of the march on Delhi, had been defeated.

40. It is convenient at this stage to examine the enemy's plan and analyse the cause of its failure.

The Japanese have always supported the doctrine that the best defence is the attack. They proved it to their satisfaction in Arakan in the Spring of 1943 and they confidently expected to prove it again in 1944. Their attacks have usually taken the form of an enveloping movement combined with infiltration and frontal attacks.

These tactics achieved success in 1943, partly owing to the lack of training of our forces and partly owing to the fact that it was not possible, for lack of supplies, for forward troops to hold out when their lines of communication were cut.

41. The Japanese plan was bold, typical of their readiness to take risks, and its execution went smoothly for the first thirty-six hours. It then began to fail, at first slowly but with increasing momentum until disaster overtook it. The main reasons for this failure were:—

(a) The Japanese conviction that we should retire if our rear was threatened, as we had done in 1943. His whole plan was based on this assumption. A captured directive, by the Commander of 55 Divisional Infantry Group, ended with this significant phrase:—"As they have previously suffered defeat, should a portion of the enemy waver the whole of them will at once get confused and victory is thus certain".

(b) The fine fighting spirit of all ranks who, in this the first large encounter with the Japanese this year, showed their superiority in jungle-fighting when well trained and adequately equipped.

(c) The ability to supply forward troops by air.

Contributory factors to its failure were our successful use of tanks over ground much of which was regarded as "untankable", the use of medium artillery, and our continual harassing from the air of the enemy's water-borne and road communications. The Japanese under-estimation of their enemy and their conviction that they would capture large quantities of supplies in the first few days, led them to neglect their arrangements for the supply of food and ammunition and their troops carried only five days' food. We defeated all their attempts to bring food or ammunition forward. In consequence, their troops soon began to suffer from hunger and starvation and shortage of ammunition. Their casualties amounted to 4,500 killed and wounded out of a total of 7,000 men.

The basic reason for our victory was, however, the refusal of our troops, or any portion of them, to waver, and their unflinching courage in exceptionally trying circumstances.

42. Mopping up in the thick mountainous jungle was a difficult and necessarily slow operation, and it was not until the 5th March that we were able to resume the interrupted course of our offensive. Razabil was captured by 5 Indian Division on the 12th March. It was found to be a position of great strength, complete with underground rooms, etc. The Tunnels position was surrounded by the 19th March, and was finally captured by 36 British Division some days later. Meanwhile, 7 Indian Division had taken Buthidaung and had also captured the outer ring of the Kyaukit defences. These defences were evacuated by the enemy on the 23rd March and considerable equipment fell into our hands. On the 25th, about 500 enemy again infiltrated to the Ngakyedauk area, but were dealt with expeditiously.

43. At the end of March, 25 Indian Division began to take over from 5 Indian Division and the latter was transferred by air to 4 Corps' front.

44. Fighting to improve our positions continued throughout April against strong opposition. As a result of successful actions by 26 Indian Division in the Buthidaung area in the first week in May, we withdrew from Buthidaung, as planned, to positions more suitable for the monsoon; forward brigades of 15 Indian Corps taking up positions on the general line Godusara—Tunnels Area—Taung Bazaar.

45. 36 British Division was withdrawn to Shillong in Assam to rest and refit, with a view to its being transferred to General Stilwell's command in North Burma at a later date. 7 Indian Division, two brigades moving by air, also left Arakan in April for 4 Corps' front.

By the end of May, therefore, we were holding Arakan with 15 Indian Corps, comprising three divisions. Our monsoon dispositions being:—

*25 Indian Division:* In the Tunnels Area, covering the Maungdaw—Buthidaung road, up to and including, the East Tunnel.

*26 Indian Division:* One brigade in the Bawli—Goppe—Taung Bazaars area. One brigade at Taungbro and the third at Cox's Bazaar.

*81 (West African) Division:* Concentrating at Chiringa.

We also had detachments on the Sangu River as flank protection against a small Japanese force which had infiltrated into that area.

46. The term "monsoon dispositions" does not imply static defence. We occupied positions of our own choice, selected for their strength and to preserve the health of our troops by avoiding the worst malarial areas. The necessity, during the monsoon in Arakan, to evacuate certain flooded districts and take up positions which are defensively strong and accessible for supplies, did not mean that every opportunity for local offensive action was not taken.