

(d) Concentrate 4 Corps in the Ye-U—Shwebo area as rapidly as possible, and by the 15th February at the latest.

Further, General Slim pointed out that the Japanese forces opposing 4 Corps were neither in great strength nor in good shape. It was therefore legitimate to take certain risks to achieve a rapid advance.

33. By the end of November, it will be remembered, the leading division of 33 Corps, 11 (East African) Division, was approaching Kalewa. It entered that village on the 2nd December, after stiff close-quarter fighting in the Chaunggyin area, six miles to the west. A battalion then crossed the Chindwin on the night of the 4th-5th December in the face of only slight opposition, but was held up two miles to the east. North of Kalewa, the brigade advancing southwards astride the river encountered stubborn resistance on the east bank, seven miles north-east of the village; but an outflanking movement caused the enemy to abandon his position and a link-up with the rest of the Division was effected. It is of interest to note that by the 10th December, Indian sappers had in 36 hours achieved the feat of erecting across the Chindwin a thousand foot Bailey pontoon bridge. The enemy unsuccessfully attempted to destroy it by air attack two days later. Two brigades of 11 (East African) Division crossed the river, but met determined opposition in their efforts to extend their bridgehead. By the 14th December, however, a semi-circular area, extending from a point six miles north-east of Kalewa to Shwegyin, five miles to the south-east, had been cleared. The withdrawal of the Division for rehabilitation then began, on relief by 2 British Division, and was completed by the end of the month.

34. On the day before 11 (East African) Division's crossing, 32 Brigade of 20 Indian Division had crossed the Chindwin about thirty miles to the north, at a point seven miles south-east of Mawlaik. The passage of the river was made mainly by rafting, and 5,065 men, 1,456 mules and 30 tons of equipment were put across this formidable obstacle in 100 hours, for the loss of one mule. The Division then advanced rapidly eastwards in difficult flooded country until it reached the Indaw—Pyingaing road. It there turned south, reaching the Pyingaing area in time to attack in the rear the enemy rearguard which was blocking the advance of 2 British Division who had come through the Kalewa bridgehead. The enemy were routed, suffering heavy casualties. 32 Brigade then continued its advance southwards, reaching a point 19 miles south of Pyingaing by the 31st December. In the meantime, the rest of 20 Indian Division (Major-General D. D. Gracey) had moved south from their concentration area at Htinzin and relieved 5 Indian Division at Kalemmyo and Khampat. Divisional Headquarters and 100 Brigade then pushed on across difficult country and occupied Maukkadaw on the Chindwin, 17 miles south-west of Pyingaing, on the 25th December. Thence, following 32 Brigade, their advance was directed on Budalin, the important Japanese communication centre 54 miles south-east of Maukkadaw, flank protection being afforded by 80 Brigade advancing west of the Chindwin.

35. 2 British Division (Major-General C. G. G. Nicholson) remained concentrated in the Yazagyo area until the 12th December, when it began its forward move to the Kalewa bridgehead. The leading Brigade, the 6th, passed through 11 (East African) Division on the 21st and advanced rapidly along the road from Kalewa towards Pyingaing. West of Pyingaing the advance was checked by a strong rearguard position. With the assistance of 32 Brigade of 20 Indian Division as stated above, the enemy was cleared, and Pyingaing was captured on the 24th. Determined resistance was again encountered in the Wainggyo Gorge, nine miles south-west of Pyingaing, but was overcome with tank support. The advance of 2 British Division continued with great speed. Dominating features astride the road 12 miles east of Pyingaing were cleared, and a large enemy detachment was successfully ambushed on the 28th December. On the 31st, the Kabo Weir, 11 miles north of Ye-U was captured intact. This was an important economic gain, since the Kabo Weir controls the irrigation of an extensive area of rice-growing country. It was a propitious entry into the Shwebo plain—the enemy's demolition party, sent to blow up the weir, arrived to find us in occupation. On the 2nd January, 5 Brigade had established itself at Ye-U and the Division was driving the enemy back on to Shwebo, the northern outskirts of which were reached by the 8th January. 64 Brigade of 19 Indian Division had already reached the eastern outskirts on the 7th, having come *via* Kanbalu. Shwebo town was finally occupied on the 10th January, after the Japanese rearguard had fought to the last man. 6 Brigade of 2 British Division was then concentrated at Shwebo after relief by 268 Indian Brigade in the Kabo Weir area. This advance of 150 miles in 20 days was a fine performance by an all-British Division.

36. On the extreme western flank of 33 Corps, a general redistribution of forces of Lushai Brigade took place early in December, Brigade Headquarters being located 18 miles north of Gangaw. Deep patrolling was maintained east to the Chindwin, while two battalions continued to close in on Gangaw *via* the Myittha Valley. They reached the area three miles north of Gangaw by the 14th December, but here they bumped strong positions which the enemy continued to hold stubbornly despite strong air attacks. Meanwhile, Irregulars had occupied Mingin, on the river 24 miles S.S.E. of Kalewa. Other Irregulars had penetrated 30 miles south of Gangaw and were engaging the enemy in the Tilin area. Lushai Brigade came under command of 4 Corps on the 23rd December.

I may add here that this formation and its Commander, Brigadier P. C. Marindin, after the fall of Kalewa and the clearing of the west side of the Chindwin (in which operations they had played an important rôle), received the congratulations of the Supreme Allied Commander on the outstanding results they had achieved under exceptionally severe conditions during the past 12 months.

37. 4 Corps (Lieutenant-General F. W. (later Sir Frank) Messervy, who had succeeded Lieutenant-General Sir Geoffrey A. P. Scoones on the 8th December) was in the area of the Upper Chindwin.