

by 2 (West African) Brigade on the 17th and sailed for Ramree. On the 19th April, 22 (East African) Brigade captured the village of Dalet on the Tanlwe Chaung nine miles north-east of Taungup. On the 28th April, 4 (West African) Brigade actually occupied Taungup, and with this fitting conclusion 82 (West African) Division and 22 (East African) Brigade passed under my direct command. The formations of 15 Indian Corps had completed their task and were withdrawn to India, less Headquarters, 15 Indian Corps and 26 Indian Division in Ramree.

211. The campaign had fulfilled its objects. The Japanese had been driven out of Arakan. The air bases, which enabled Fourteenth Army to continue its rapid advance, had been secured, 54 Japanese Division and the Sakura detached force of 55 Japanese Division had been largely destroyed. The balance of 55 Division, already seriously depleted by our 1944 offensive, was kept deployed on the coast until too late to offer any serious resistance to Fourteenth Army.

SECTION XII (paras. 212-227), PLANS FOR THE CAPTURE OF RANGOON

The situation in Central Burma at the end of March: General Slim's plan for the drive south: The decision to go for Rangoon by sea: Reasons for this decision: Directive issued by the Supreme Allied Commander on the 17th April.

212. It will be remembered (paragraph 92) that on the 27th February I had directed General Slim to destroy the Japanese forces in the Mandalay Plain and to seize Rangoon before the monsoon. During the second half of March the clearing of the Mandalay Plain proceeded with very great loss to the enemy (paragraphs 102 to 127). The remnants of 15 Japanese Army were being driven by 33 Corps east of the road Mandalay—Thazi and were endeavouring to retreat south along the tracks in the foothills. Their 33rd and 28th Armies had suffered severe casualties and lost many guns, but, although their fighting value had decreased, it was by no means negligible. It was important that they should not be given time to recover from the battering they had received. Our own losses, considering the nature of the fighting, had not been excessive and, with one important exception, they had been replaced. (This exception was in the British battalions. While we had the reinforcements at Comilla, we lacked the transport aircraft to fly them in.) The morale of our troops was magnificent and had to be seen to be fully realised.

213. General Slim's task now was to get to Rangoon before the monsoon broke, which might be in early May. Time was thus very short. Our biggest problem, as always, was administrative. It was not possible to maintain more than five divisions south of the line Meiktila—Yenangyaung, and our supply difficulties were, of course, going to increase in direct proportion to the length and speed of our advance. Thus the enemy might be able to concentrate superior forces against one, or even more than one of our possible lines of advance if he were given time to recover his balance.

214. Since a simultaneous advance in strength down both the road and rail axis, on the east, and the river axis, on the west, was ruled out for maintenance reasons, the question arose on which axis our main thrust should be concentrated. Speed being essential, the striking force would have to be on a fully mechanised basis. The eastern axis was selected for two reasons. First, the river (western) line of advance contained many more water crossings. Since we must expect all bridges to be blown, these obstacles would seriously delay our progress. Secondly, an advance down the eastern axis would cut off many more of the enemy. Those escaping east from the Irrawaddy would have to cross a range of difficult jungle-clad hills, possibly at a time when the monsoon would be at its height, and then have to attempt to break out, through flooded country, across the Mandalay—Rangoon road, along which we should have established a cordon.

215. General Slim decided that the advance down the eastern axis should be made by 4 Corps, because 5 and 17 Indian Divisions were already organized each with two mechanised brigades and one air-transportable brigade, and because this Corps was already concentrated in the Meiktila area, well south of 33 Corps. This plan entailed moving 2 British and 20 Indian Divisions from the north-east to the south-west into the Irrawaddy Valley, where they would join 7 Indian Division, which had already been placed under 33 Corps. 19 Indian and 36 British Divisions would constitute the army reserve. The general method of advance to be adopted by 4 Corps was to be the seizure of an airstrip, or a site for one, by a rapid bound forward, followed by the fly-in of an air-transportable brigade. While this brigade held the airstrip area, the rest of the division would make its next bound. Airstrips would be required every fifty miles. Divisions were to advance by leap-frogging, each division halting on reaching its objective while the other passed through. South of Toungoo, all the formations of 4 Corps would be on air supply, while those to the north would be maintained by road, supplemented by rail as far as the number of locomotives, the amount of rolling stock, and the state of the line permitted. 33 Corps was allotted enough supply air-lift for one division, the rest of the Corps thus being dependent on supply by road and inland water transport.

216. On the 18th March, the Commander, Fourteenth Army, had issued an Operation Instruction to his Corps Commanders dividing the forthcoming operations into three phases:—the present battle, the re-grouping stage, and the advance south. The intention was stated thus:—

“On completion of the task of destroying the Japanese forces in Central Burma, Fourteenth Army will:—

(a) Capture Rangoon at all costs and as soon as possible before the monsoon.

(b) Capture Yenangyaung, Magwe and Prome.

(c) Secure the area Myingyan—Mandalay—Maymyo—Chauk, and the road and railway axis Meiktila to Rangoon.”

217. The instructions given to the two Corps for the regrouping stage were that 4 Corps,