

Generalissimo how vital the continued operations of the Chinese forces in Burma were, since the issue of the main battle was not yet decided, upon which our chance of capturing Rangoon before the monsoon depended. While he insisted on their eventual withdrawal, the Generalissimo appeared to agree to the Chinese divisions continuing the present operations, but in actual fact the Chinese forces never came beyond Lashio and Hsipaw. Moreover, the Combined Chiefs of Staff confirmed the Generalissimo's request for the Mars Brigade, whose retention I had particularly pressed, by an order for their move to China at once. As will be seen from the account of operations below, this put a virtual end to the offensive operations of Northern Combat Area Command, though, of course, I realised that it would be considered that the American forces in Burma had achieved their primary object once the Burma Road was opened to connect with the road they had built from Ledo. I had hoped that Northern Combat Area Command, beside co-operating in the Mandalay battle, could assist our further advance by sending weak forces southwards towards Loilem, but this was not to be.

119. On the 9th March, 36 British Division captured Mongmit, and, advancing south-west reached Mogok on the 20th. They were then directed on to Kyaukme, which lies some 45 miles due south of Mogok. 50 Chinese Division, advancing southwards from Namtu, entered Hsipaw on the 16th March, and then turned west down the road towards Kyaukme. 38 Chinese Division captured Lashio on the 7th March, and by the end of the month had pushed south-south-east 38 miles along the Lashio—Mongyai road. Other troops from this Division turned south-west down the Lashio—Hsipaw road and, by the 26th March, had linked up with 50 Chinese Division in the Hsipaw area.

120. This limited advance was the end of Northern Combat Area Command's operations. Unfortunately, the relaxing of the pressure had, as already shown, allowed the Japanese to reinforce the Mandalay sector from this front. The bulk of 18 Japanese Division had been brought into the Meiktila battle, while later 56 Japanese Division with the remaining regiment of the 18th were ordered to withdraw their main forces for the main battle and hold the right flank with minimum strength. On the 30th March, I issued orders for 36 British Division to come under command of Fourteenth Army on reaching Kyaukme. I also directed that one brigade should be flown into Mandalay as quickly as possible. The whole of 36 British Division was then to relieve 19 Indian Division and assume control of operations in the Maymyo—Mandalay—Ava area. This would relieve the strain on Fourteenth Army until the Japanese had been pushed further south, but it could only be regarded as a temporary expedient since the American aircraft, on which 36 British Division was dependent for maintenance, were to be withdrawn in May, before which the Division would have to be flown out to India. 36 British Division, less 26 Indian Infantry Brigade which remained in Burma, was actually flown out between the 1st and 21st May.

121. Returning now to the main battle on the Fourteenth Army front: while our forces in

Meiktila were engaged in frustrating and destroying the Japanese built-up against them, the remainder of 4 Corps was engaged in pushing back the enemy west of the Irrawaddy, and in expanding the Nyaungu bridgehead southwards towards Chauk and eastwards towards Myingyan. On the 18th March, 33 Brigade (7 Indian Division) attacked prepared positions south of Myingyan, securing the road and railway crossing. On the 21st with tank support, they forced an entry into the town, and by the 23rd the whole of Myingyan had been cleared. Meanwhile, a detachment of the same Brigade had cleared the Chindwin-Irrawaddy confluence area to the north-west. The capture of Myingyan was a very important gain since it opened the way for our Inland Water Transport (I.W.T.) on the Chindwin. The administrative plan was to transport supplies by water from Kalewa to Myingyan, and thence by rail to Meiktila. It will be remembered that we had no all-weather road from Kalewa to Shwebo; the alternative route by water was therefore very important. A very great deal of transport and constructional effort was being expended on this I.W.T. L. of C. as can be seen in more detail in the part of this Despatch which deals with administration, and it paid good dividends.

122. At the same time as 7 Indian Division (33 Brigade) was attacking Myingyan, 5 Indian Division (161 Brigade) was advancing on Taungtha. The hill *massif* north of the town dominates the whole of this area and, after an assault launched on the 28th March, this feature was captured the following day. On the 30th, Taungtha was occupied. 161 Brigade was at once relieved by 33 Brigade from Myingyan and continued the advance, passing through Mahlaing on the 31st March and making contact with 17 Indian Division in the vicinity of Thabutkon. The road to Meiktila was open, and the rear echelon of 17 Indian Division, followed by the whole of 5 Indian Division (less the air-transportable brigade already in Meiktila), moved forward immediately.

123. As already described (paragraph 111), Yamamoto's offensive against 4 Corps' bridgehead had completely failed. His forces on both banks of the river were pushed back and, by the end of March, 89 Brigade (7 Indian Division) had entered Lanywa on the west bank and were successfully probing south from Singu, and west towards Kyaukpadaung, east of the river. 7 Indian Division (less 33 Brigade) was placed under command of 33 Corps on the 29th March, when that Corps entered the area in which the Division was operating. 33 Brigade reverted to under the command of 7 Indian Division on the 31st March.

124. 20 Indian Division linked up their bridgehead with that of 2 British Division to the east on the 2nd March. The prolonged period of severe defensive fighting had ended and all three brigades broke out of the bridgehead. By the 10th March, 80 Brigade had taken Gyo to the south-east, capturing eleven guns. On this date, also, 32 Brigade began its break-through against stiff opposition and advanced three miles. By the 12th March, 100 Brigade (from the west flank of the Myinmu bridgehead) had captured the important road junction of Myotha, inflicting heavy casualties. The advance continued eastwards