

I.N.A. troops. Covering the 65 miles from Meiktila in three days, 32 Brigade reached Taungdwingyi on the 18th April. The booty taken included a useful haul of 1,500 gallons of petrol and 3,500 gallons of oil. Surprise was complete; for some days afterwards, enemy convoys, routed *via* Taungdwingyi, continued to be welcomed by 20 Indian Division. 32 Brigade was followed by 80 Brigade, which entered Natmawk, 28 miles north-north-west of Taungdwingyi, on the 15th April. Both Brigades then continued their rapid advance westwards to the Irrawaddy. 32 Brigade reached the river at Myingun, nine miles south-east of Magwe, on the 19th without opposition. On the same day, 80 Brigade occupied Magwe after slight opposition from astonished Japanese administrative units. We thus controlled the Irrawaddy at two points 22 and 33 miles south of Yenangyaung respectively. Considerable equipment was captured in Magwe and, once more, unsuspecting convoys entering the town were captured.

231. With their retreat cut off at Magwe, the Japanese troops to the north of it, on the east bank, were compelled to cross the river. They joined the main body of Yamamoto's force, which was pulling out down the west bank after the fall of Yenangyaung. Their retreat was harried by two brigades of 7 Indian Division, 89 Brigade crossing the river and linking up with 114 Brigade, which was already operating on that side. The Japanese in their effort to move south were pushed off the main roads and their retreat became increasingly difficult.

232. The situation in 20 Indian Division's area on the 26th April was as follows. 80 Brigade in the Magwe area had pushed patrols across the river, which reported enemy motor transport moving west out of Minbu. Magwe itself was being heavily shelled from the west side of the Irrawaddy. 100 Brigade was passing through 32 Brigade on the road leading from Sathwa to Allanmyo. After clearing opposition 26 miles north of Allanmyo on the 27th, 100 Brigade again made contact just north of the town. Allanmyo fell the following day, after 36 hours fighting, and we captured five guns. Meanwhile, 80 Brigade, advancing south from Magwe, was destroying many parties of the enemy who were trying to cross the river from the right bank and escape eastwards. At Allanmyo, 100 Brigade were 252 miles from Rangoon on the 28th April. By the 2nd May, breaking through all enemy attempts to stop it, it had advanced a further 40 miles and captured the great river port (now in ruins) of Prome, the eastern terminus of the road from Taungup. The last escape route of the remnants of the Japanese forces in South Arakan was now blocked.

233. I will now turn to the main axis of the drive south, the road and railway between Mandalay and Rangoon. After the failure of his counter-offensive in the Meiktila area, the Commander, 33 Japanese Army, decided to halt our advance north and west of Pyawbwe, 24 miles south-east of Meiktila, where good natural defensive positions exist. He withdrew 18 Japanese Division, through Thazi, to take up positions covering Pyawbwe from the north and he ordered 53 Japanese Division to withdraw from west of Meiktila and occupy positions west of Pyawbwe. 49 Japanese Division,

which had already suffered severely at our hands, was to act as a rearguard, delaying our advance down the Meiktila—Pyawbwe road. Further to the east, 15 Japanese Division was being withdrawn through Taunggyi and Loikaw so that it could reinforce the railway lower down.

234. Pushing south from Meiktila, on the 5th April, 48 Brigade of 17 Indian Division met heavy opposition eight miles down the Pyawbwe road. Leaving a detachment to deal with this, the Brigade by-passed the enemy position and advanced another five miles, overcoming further opposition north of Yindaw. They were eventually held up by minefields and heavy mortar fire at the village itself. 99 Brigade, operating east of the road, cleared village after village, eventually being held up nine miles south-south-east of Meiktila. 63 Brigade on the right flank made an advance of five miles. It was evident even at this early stage of the advance that 49 Japanese Division was putting up a determined stand. On the 6th April, the enemy again re-occupied the positions eight miles south-east of Meiktila from which they had been cleared by a detachment of 48 Brigade the previous evening. We attacked again, this time annihilating the defenders. Yindaw still held out, but was by-passed by a battalion and 255 Indian Tank Brigade, less a squadron, which was operating with 99 Brigade. On the 7th, this battalion and a detachment of tanks overcame enemy opposition near Ywadin, seven miles due west of Pyawbwe, and were then held up by a blown bridge. Meanwhile 63 Brigade reached Ywadin.

235. On the 8th April, on the main Meiktila—Pyawbwe road, Yindaw still held out, but its reduction was left to 161 Brigade of 5 Indian Division, which was following 17 Indian Division according to plan. 48 Brigade by-passed it and fought their way forward to within eight miles of Pyawbwe, shelling the enemy with some of their own guns, which had been captured on the 6th. Meanwhile 99 Brigade was still fighting north of Yindaw, inflicting heavy casualties. On the 9th April, 5 Indian Division captured Yindaw, killing almost the entire garrison and capturing three guns. On this date, 99 Brigade with tank support captured part of the high ground three miles north of Pyawbwe and reached the landing ground just north-west of the town. 48 Brigade, attacking astride the road, broke through stubborn resistance, inflicting heavy losses and capturing two guns. 63 Brigade occupied a village two miles west-south-west of Pyawbwe, taking three guns and then probed forward to the outskirts of the town. Meanwhile our armoured columns were operating south-west and south of Pyawbwe, capturing artillery and slaughtering the gun crews. Altogether a total of fifteen guns (some medium) were taken by 17 Indian Division during the fighting on the 9th April. Pyawbwe fell on the 10th to co-ordinated attacks by infantry from the north and west and armoured troops from the south-west, the latter assault proving decisive.

236. Our victory at Pyawbwe was one of the most costly defeats the enemy had suffered during the whole campaign. During our advance, 49 Japanese Division, already greatly depleted in strength, was practically