

which had become serious on the 20th April rapidly deteriorated. On the 21st April it was reported that the whole of the Chinese 55 Division had been scattered by the Japanese attack, and on the 22nd that the Japanese had captured Hopong and were advancing north towards Hsipaw and Lashio with armoured forces and motorised infantry. It was never possible to discover the exact strength of the Japanese thrust but of the weakness of the Chinese forces between them and Lashio there could be no doubt. A good deal of damage was done by panic in the rear areas, especially at Lashio, and I sent Brigadier Martin, my chief liaison officer with the Chinese forces, to attempt to restore order and confidence there, which he succeeded in doing. Under the orders of General Stilwell, 28 Chinese Division (less one regiment) was moved during this period from Mandalay to Hsipaw, but the disorganisation of the railways made this movement very slow. I therefore took steps to protect my rear by sending a detachment from the British Infantry Depot at Maymyo to hold the Gokteik Gorge on the Lashio Road. On 23rd and 24th April the Chinese 200 Division captured Taunggyi and advanced towards Hopong. On the 24th April I asked General Stilwell to come and see me at Maymyo. The situation, however, did not permit of his leaving his Headquarters and therefore on the morning of the 25th April, in company with my M.G., G.S., I went to General Stilwell's Headquarters at Kyaukse and I arranged to meet there General Slim, Commander 1 Burcorps. Here I learned that the enemy were putting heavy pressure on the Chinese 96 Division which was holding the front, that this Division was breaking up and that the Japanese were advancing from Pinyinmana on Pyawbwe. One regiment in the Thazi area had been moved to the Shan States. In consequence, Meiktila was now devoid of infantry. General Stilwell was not sanguine about the operations in the Shan States and I formed the impression that Chinese resistance on the Pyawbwe front was likely to collapse altogether very soon. I therefore issued orders for the plan of withdrawal north of Mandalay to be put into operation commencing on the night of the 25th/26th April. I also ordered 1 Burcorps to take over rear guard from the Chinese on the axis Meiktila—Mandalay and to cover the withdrawal of the Chinese 22 and 96 Divisions north of Meiktila. My decision was telephoned to Army Headquarters at 1300 hours and evacuation of units and installations remaining in Maymyo was begun.

50. *Decision to dispose Imperial Forces for Defence of India.* I now considered that the situation had clarified sufficiently for me to decide on the future role of the Imperial Forces. I was of the opinion that the capture of Lashio by the Japanese was only a question of time and that there would be nothing to stop them moving on Bhamo, thus turning my communications with Myitkyina. Subsequent events proved this opinion to be correct, but it was impossible for me to disengage any forces to send to Bhamo. I also thought that the condition of the Chinese armies precluded the possibility of being able to hold Mandalay and the Irrawaddy line for very long. In these circumstances, I decided that my main object

was the defence of India, but I had two subsidiary objects:—

- (a) to maintain touch with the Chinese, and
- (b) to get as much as possible of the Imperial Force back to India so that it could be reorganised.

51. I issued to General Slim, Commander 1 Burcorps, on the 26th April, a D.O. letter embodying my plan which was to be implemented after the Mandalay—Irrawaddy line was given up. This was as follows:—

- (a) for the defence of India two infantry brigades astride the Chindwin to delay the enemy as far south as possible, and
- (b) a strong detachment in the Myittha Valley.

The above to be maintained eventually from Kalewa, as well as the detachment in (c) below.

(c) the remainder of the force to move via Ye-U on Kalewa leaving a detachment to cover this route.

(d) I determined to keep contact with the Chinese. I hoped to be able to keep the 38 Division which was fighting so well under the command of 1 Burcorps.

This plan was subsequently modified as will appear later.

52. The execution of the amended plan of withdrawal to the Mandalay—Irrawaddy line was most expeditiously put into effect by 1 Burcorps, the 17 Division, with the 7 Armoured Brigade under command taking over rear guard on the axis Meiktila—Mandalay. On the 26th April the 7 Armoured Brigade attacked and dispersed an enemy column eight miles south of Meiktila and the withdrawal of the rear parties of the 63 Infantry Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade from this area was delayed until midnight 26th/27th April in order to cover the 22 and 96 Chinese Divisions and the Fifth Army Troops, which had been ordered back from the Kalaw area.

On the 26th April I moved my Headquarters to Shwebo and preparations were put in hand for making the Ye-U—Kalewa road fit for M.T. as far as possible and for stocking the road with supplies and water. Major-General Wakely, Commander L. of C. Area, was placed in charge of all work on the road.

53. On the 27th April reliable information was received that a large Japanese force was in the Nagape area (west of Magwe) date uncertain, but probably between the 15th and 20th April, and that this force was moving north via Myittha Valley with the intention of cutting the Assam road at Kalembo. In view of this information I visited Headquarters 1 Burcorps on 28th April and made there the following alterations to the plan for a further withdrawal when the Mandalay—Irrawaddy position had to be abandoned:—

The force moving up the Myittha Valley had already been increased to include the whole of the 2 Burma Brigade, which was on the right bank of the Irrawaddy. I confirmed this and in addition arranged for one infantry brigade of the 1 Burma Division to be sent by river to Kalewa and thence to Kalembo. As a result of these alterations, the force astride the Chindwin would consist of one infantry brigade of the 1 Burma Division and one brigade of the