

actions which resulted amounted to pure slaughter. The enemy, caught completely on the wrong foot, was engaged by aircraft, tanks and infantry and thrown into utter confusion. Here again, the "Cab Rank" method proved most efficacious.

109. To say that our capture of Meiktila came as a surprise to the enemy Command would be an understatement. Not only was the blow utterly unexpected, but their Intelligence was for some time completely baffled as to what troops had inflicted it. The general counter-offensive plans for early March had to be put aside, as, until Meiktila was recaptured and our forces south of Mandalay destroyed, no major attacks could be launched north and west of the Irrawaddy. On the other hand, failure to recapture Meiktila could result in disaster for practically the whole of the Burma Area Army. Although captured orders show that Kimura realised this, yet, curiously enough, other documents show that he still intended to prosecute what he called "The decisive battle of the Irrawaddy Shore." The result was that he adopted half-measures. He countermanded the moves directed against 33 Corps (*vide* paragraph 95) and diverted these formations on to Meiktila, stressing, in his orders, the vital necessity for speed. He also directed General Yamamoto in the west (Yenangyaung area) to sever 4 Corps' communications by capturing their Pakokku bridgehead by an advance up both banks of the Irrawaddy. But he gave no orders to his forces who were about Mandalay or south of the river to withdraw, evidently considering he could restore the situation about Meiktila while continuing the battle in the north. Here, as so often before, the Japanese under-estimation of their enemy was to prove fatal to them.

110. The forces which Kimura concentrated to recover Meiktila were as follows: 18 Japanese Division (less 114 Regiment), brought south from the Northern Combat Area Command's front; 119 Regiment (53 Japanese Division), from south of Mandalay; 214 Regiment (33 Japanese Division) from the Irrawaddy front, opposite Pakokku; and 49 Japanese Division (less 153 Regiment) which had been hurried north from Pegu. These forces were reinforced by Army Troops, including medium artillery and some tanks. It was a formidable concentration and it was being rapidly effected. Our forces in Meiktila comprised 17 Indian Division and one tank brigade. The only reinforcement available was 5 Indian Division, which moved forward from Jorhat (700 miles distant) on the 5th March. Its forward concentration was carried out with great speed and the whole Division (less its air-transportable brigade) had reached 7 Indian Division's bridgehead at Nyaungu 10 days later. The fly-in of the remaining brigade from Pael to Meiktila was completed on the 17th March, but I will refer to this again. It will be seen, therefore, that the enemy was concentrating the equivalent of six brigades, plus Army units, against our four infantry brigades and one tank brigade. There was nothing perturbing about this, but it must be remembered that our communications were vulnerable; our forward airfields were exposed to attack, as, also, was the road back *via* Taungtha, while the road west, *via* Kyaukpadaung, was of course still

under enemy control. Our object, therefore, was to hold Meiktila, acting as offensively as possible, while 7 Indian Division kept open the bridgehead area and enabled 5 Indian Division to pass through.

111. As already stated (paragraph 109), the enemy commander at Yenangyaung had been ordered to seize our bridgehead at Nyaungu, thus cutting our L. of C. to Meiktila. Yamamoto's plan was to make a converging attack from the west, on the right bank, and from the south and east on the left bank. This offensive, however, was uncoordinated. The I.N.A. Division attempted an assault from the east against 114 Brigade in the bridgehead, but its attacks were half-hearted and were driven back with heavy casualties. To the south, a Japanese force, assembling for an attack near Singu four miles north-east of Chauk, was caught and routed by 89 Brigade. The attack on the bridgehead from the west was prevented from developing by 28 (East African) Brigade, which successfully repulsed a series of attacks. Thus ended the threat to our communications at Nyaungu.

112. 28 (East African) Brigade deserves some remarks. Besides 11 (East African) Division, the original East African contingent included two independent brigades, the 22nd and the 28th, which were originally allotted for defence duties in Ceylon. Shortage of formations, however, had resulted in both brigades being sent to Burma, primarily to undertake duties on the L. of C. The Commander, Fourteenth Army, soon found himself forced, through lack of sufficient troops, to employ 28 (East African) Brigade in the line, although the formation had not really reached a sufficiently advanced state of training to be pitted against the enemy. It will be remembered that a reverse was suffered resulting in a withdrawal to the Letse area. Reinforced, however, by an Indian battalion and some artillery, the Brigade fought well, as shown above. In accordance with the decisions reached at a Conference with the G.O.C.-in-C., East Africa, held in February, 28 (East African) Brigade was flown out of Burma to Dohazari in March and April, and broken up, as the first step in the reduction of the East African forces, which, owing to the man-power situation, were to be reduced to the one division by early 1946.

113. On the east flank of the Irrawaddy battlefield, over a 100 miles up river, another great battle was raging. 19 Indian Division, which had broken out of its bridgehead on the 20th February, had begun its drive down the east bank of the river, advancing with great speed and determination. The two Japanese divisions (the 15th and 53rd) opposing 19 Indian Division completely failed to stop it. Strong positions were either assaulted, with tank and air support, or were by-passed. In a "leap-frogging" advance, 98 Brigade were the first troops to reach the Chaungmagyi, establishing a bridgehead on the 5th March; while, further north, 64 Brigade was still mopping up in the Pinle area and 62 Brigade was fighting at Yenatha, which they captured on the 6th. The result of this method of advance was that we reached and passed through Madaya before the enemy had time to retire to the strongly prepared positions covering the two water barriers north of the town. This spectacular