

cleared. When 1 Brigade was firmly established, 4 Brigade was to drive down towards it from Taung Bazaar. Subsequently, when the whole Buthidaung area had been cleared, 82 (West African) Division, less one brigade left for rear protection, was to advance through Kindaung on Htizwe. The rate of advance was to be co-ordinated with 53 Brigade to ensure that the Divisional task of protecting the Corps' eastern flank was effectively carried out. From Htizwe, 82 (West African) Division was to cross the Kanzaik Pass into the Kaladan Valley, relieve 81 (West African) Division north of Myohaung, and then to continue the advance south.

142. The 11th December saw 74 Brigade of 25 Indian Division beginning its advance in the coastal sector—a flying start in order to attract the enemy's attention away from the Buthidaung area. On the 12th December, 51 Brigade extended its hold east towards Buthidaung against slight opposition. By the 14th December, 53 Brigade had concentrated in the eastern foothills of the Mayu Range, four miles south of Letwedet. Forward elements of 82 (West African) Division had debouched from the Tunnels, passed through 51 Brigade, and had reached Buthidaung and Baguna. By the 15th December, 2 (West African) Brigade had secured Buthidaung and cleared it of the enemy, and 82 (West African) Division had secured its first objectives. The advance of 15 Indian Corps was thus successfully launched on both the 25th and 82nd Divisional fronts.

143. Further east, in the Kaladan Valley, the main body of 81 (West African) Division had crossed the Kaladan River by the 12th December, while on the west side of the river a detachment attacked and drove the enemy from positions south of Kinthe (14 miles south of Kaladan Village). The crossing of the Kaladan is described in more detail in paragraph 154 below. The West Africans had carried out a highly successful advance against opposition, covering 50 miles in 42 days. This rate of advance may not sound very rapid, but it was achieved through extremely dense and difficult country. There is no doubt that its speed took the Japanese by surprise and forced them to withdraw southward, abandoning areas which they had intended to hold, but which were now outflanked.

144. A significant report was received about this time (mid-December) stating that the Japanese had started to improve the track over the An Pass, leading westwards from Minbu on the Irrawaddy, to Dalet, on the west coast. This route was obviously intended to provide interior lines of supply from the middle Irrawaddy to the Arakan coast, or else a means of withdrawal in the reverse direction. The only other practicable route lay much further south, a fair-weather road from Taungup inland to Prome.

145. In the early stages of the advance of 25 Indian Division, the enemy were amply in evidence in the hills, but they were so rapidly outflanked that only on one occasion did they succeed in launching an attack on the advancing column. This was repulsed with heavy loss to the attackers. What did happen however, was that the Japanese on more than one occasion attacked areas in our rear which

were devoid of troops. The enemy shelling did nothing to impede our advance; moreover it proved somewhat profitable, since ruthless counter-battery action was invariably forthcoming from the watchful destroyers NAPIER and NEPAL lying off the coast, which also, on occasions, even dispersed enemy detachments attempting to destroy bridges on the line of our advance. By the 20th December, 74 Brigade of 25 Indian Division had already covered half the distance from Maungdaw to Foul Point.

146. On the 19th December, the Navy turned their attention to a strategical target and the NAPIER shelled the town of Rathedaung, east of the Mayu Range and on the far bank of the Mayu River, which was the Headquarters of the Japanese "Sakura Detached Force." Their fire was controlled by an Army Air Observation Post and the incident constituted an innovation in inter-Service liaison in this theatre. The results were most satisfactory. Indin Village was occupied on the 21st and its airstrip was soon in commission. In country where operational airfields were not easy to construct, this acquisition proved of great value in subsequent operations. 74 Brigade's next bound was to Donbaik, the scene of the battle of early 1943. The enemy had recently improved this strong position, and it might have provided us with a problem. But the Japanese had been left far in the rear and the defile was occupied on the 23rd December before the enemy could get any garrison back to man their defences. They did, however, cut in behind our troops, but our advance continued unchecked. The incident merely served to illustrate once again the importance of sea power; had we been dependent on supplies by road, this severance of land communications could not have been thus ignored. As it was, the Brigade was effectively maintained by Naval landing craft and the I.W.T.

147. 74 Brigade reached Foul Point, at the tip of the Mayu Peninsula, on the 26th December, after an advance of 30 miles in 14 days, and by the 27th December, the dominating hill features in the neighbourhood were in our possession. This opened the mouths of the Mayu and Kywede Rivers for the operations of light Naval craft and for sea-borne maintenance. The whole of the south of the peninsula was reported clear of the enemy and the Brigade began to concentrate for future operations.

148. While 74 Brigade had been making rapid progress in the coastal sector, 53 Brigade had been advancing east of the spine with 82 (West African) Division, moving down the axis of the Mayu River. Some determined resistance from enemy covering positions had been encountered and, in addition, 82 (West African) Division had been impeded by adverse tidal conditions at major river crossings. After the occupation of Buthidaung and Baguna (paragraph 142) 82 (West African) Division began an opposed crossing of the Kalapanzin River. The following day, a second surprise crossing was effected a few miles further south, but the enemy held grimly to the foothills overlooking the road and the advance was checked.

149. While these operations were in progress, the immense task of assembling and launching the large fleet of boats on the Kalapanzin River