

On the 7th March, however, the force in Pegu was ordered to cut its way out and this it eventually succeeded in doing with the loss of some of its transport. Meanwhile, 63 Infantry Brigade had concentrated near Hlegu and it was decided to use this brigade to attack the road block north of Taukkyan early on the 8th March, strongly supported by tanks and artillery.

This attack of 63 Infantry Brigade was unsuccessful in effecting an immediate clearance of the road block. The situation was very serious but such troops of 16 Indian Infantry Brigade as were available were collected from Hlegu, together with some tanks, and another attack was carried out later in the morning. This attack succeeded. The road block was found to be clear and, although there was a good deal of sniping which made it necessary to piquet the route with the 16 Infantry Brigade, the column moved north without further serious interference. That this was possible was partly due to the fact that the Japanese, in their eagerness to reach Rangoon, had passed further round our left flank and were actually entering the north-west outskirts of the town as our troops were moving north through the road block.

While the column, consisting of Army Headquarters, administrative units, etc., moved northwards from Taukkyan, the withdrawal of the remainder of 17 Division from Pegu and Hlegu continued. On the night of the 8th March, 17 Division (less a detachment of tanks and infantry which had been sent to keep open the road Taukkyan—Tharrawaddy) was concentrated in the Taukkyan area. It may be remarked here that intensive bombing attacks by the enemy could have done great damage, as the whole force was now concentrated in a comparatively small area.

That this did not take place was due to the temporary but complete ascendancy which had been established by the R.A.F. during recent Japanese attacks in which the enemy had sustained very severe losses. The few enemy bombers which did attempt to attack the Taukkyan area were kept at a great height by our light and heavy anti-aircraft artillery.

The move northwards from Taukkyan was commenced on the morning of 9th March.

My intention was to concentrate 17 Division in the area Thonze—Tharrawaddy—Letpadan and to hold the line Henzada—Sanywe Ferry—Thonze—Thonze Chaung.

The withdrawal from Taukkyan was without enemy interference and concentration in the new area was completed by evening of 11th March.

8. *Effect of the Loss of Rangoon.* The effect of the loss of Rangoon was very serious, since it is the only point of entry to Burma through which personnel and supplies can be moved in large numbers.

9. Rangoon was the base port for Burma and after the fall of that city the army was fighting facing its former base and with no L. of C. behind it. In the absence of a road to India the army was virtually cut off from outside assistance and could be supplied only with the very limited numbers of personnel and small quantities of stores which could be brought in by air. Base and L. of C.

installations and reserves of various commodities had already been moved north of Rangoon and this back loading had to continue throughout the withdrawal, which placed an enormous strain on the administrative machine and on the transportation agencies. Civil heavy repair installations in the Rangoon area which could not be moved were lost altogether and the maintenance of mechanical transport and equipment became a matter of great difficulty.

10. The destruction of the refineries, where the refining of all crude oil from the oil fields had been carried out, very much reduced the output of motor and aviation spirit and lubricating oils and rendered the Allied Forces in Burma dependent on such spirit as could be produced by improvised methods in the oil fields themselves, when reserve stocks had been consumed.

11. The loss of the Rangoon aerodromes with their efficient warning system had the most serious consequences for the R.A.F. and on the air situation in Burma. This will be touched on in more detail in a later paragraph.

12. Turning to the enemy side of the picture, the fall of Rangoon transferred to the Japanese nearly all the advantages in communications which had previously been held by the Imperial Forces. Instead of having to supply their army by difficult mountain roads the Japanese were now able, after effecting repairs to the port, to move very large forces by sea to Burma. In fact it is not too much to say that until such time as the road from Assam to Burma was completed the retention of Upper Burma by the allies was dependent on the amount of force which the Japanese decided to employ in that theatre. The task of the allies therefore was to impose the maximum delay on the enemy and make him expend resources which he might have employed elsewhere.

PART II.—REGROUPING OF FORCES CONSEQUENT ON THE FALL OF RANGOON.

13. A period of comparative quiet followed the withdrawal from Rangoon. Apparently, at this time the enemy was resting and re-fitting in the Rangoon area whilst his propaganda machine exploited to the full the fall of the city. This period of quiet was most welcome as my forces were badly in need of rest and reorganisation.

14. Having failed in my primary task of holding Rangoon, I now had to consider my secondary task which was the retention of Upper Burma. In order to achieve this it was necessary to regroup the forces.

15. *The Situation on the Irrawaddy Front* At this stage the 17 Division was reforming in the area Thonze—Tharrawaddy—Letpadan and carrying out reconnaissances with a view to the selection of the most suitable ground on which to fight the enemy in the Irrawaddy valley. In view of the situation on the Toungoo front, a position around Prome and south of that town was finally chosen as offering the best ground for future operations.

16. *The Situation on the Toungoo Front, Arrival of the Chinese Fifth Army.* To divert attention from the Irrawaddy front, 1 Burma