

Division continued its sweep south into the loop of the river against steadily mounting resistance. On the right flank, 20 Indian Division, advancing from Maukkadaw across difficult country, captured Budalin on the 10th January, after four days of the most bitter fighting. A week later, they were within five miles of Monywa, which, despite our bombing, still functioned as the chief Japanese river port on the Chindwin.

72. In the new 4 Corps sector, Lushai Brigade crowned its splendid fighting career by capturing Gangaw on the 12th January after a month's serious fighting. The village itself was entered unopposed after the enemy positions covering it had been stormed with the aid of heavy air support. 28 (East African) Brigade (Brigadier T. H. S. Galletly) then relieved Lushai Brigade, which was flown out later to India for rest and refit. While the above operations were in progress, 7 Indian Division had begun its advance south. By the 7th January, it had reached Natchaung, some 12 miles south of Kalembo and a hundred miles from its concentration area at Tamu. It was being followed by 255 Indian Tank Brigade, which on this date (7th January) was concentrated 72 miles south of Tamu. The steady advance southwards on this front was maintained. Enemy resistance in the Tilin area was quickly overcome and Tilin itself occupied by 28 (East African) Brigade on the 22nd January, by which date Headquarters, 4 Corps, had opened at Kan.

73. The passage of 4 Corps south to Pakokku presented considerable engineer problems. There was an unmetalled track of sorts from Kalembo to Pakokku, but it required widening throughout its length and much bridging. The only difficult sections were some rocky hill stretches amounting in all to about 40 miles. The main problems were, first, to work on a narrow road without impeding the continuous stream of traffic which flowed throughout the 24 hours and, secondly, the movement of engineer units and equipment forward in the limited amount of transport that was available, and their maintenance. In general the plan adopted was that the divisional engineers worked forward bringing the track up to a standard to carry three-tonners and Corps engineers followed making it passable for heavy lorries and transporters, including construction of the water crossings. Although the policy was that this road would be abandoned after the passage of 4 Corps it was in fact kept open as a subsidiary L. of C. until the Inland Water Transport link from Kalewa to Myingyan was in operation. Nevertheless it was a rough passage to travel by this route and drivers who had experienced the Kabaw Valley during the monsoon were unanimously of the opinion that they would rather drive through two feet of mud than three feet of dust. The latter, between Tilin and Pauk, on occasions proved to be a barrier even to the usually ubiquitous jeep. It is worth remarking, none the less, that the original plan of moving 4 Corps up over the route taken by 19 Indian Division would have been far more difficult and, with the engineer resources at our disposal, would have probably been impracticable.

74. 7 Indian Division was not to be thwarted by any of the difficulties described

above. While work on the road was in progress, 89 Brigade, operating in two columns, executed a skilful flanking movement through the hills, which forced the enemy to vacate their strong positions covering Pauk on the 27th January. By the 31st January, 7 Indian Division was seven miles east of Pyinchaung, after forcing the double crossing of the Yaw Chaung against unexpectedly light opposition. 28 (East African) Brigade was operating to the south, covering the right flank of the Corps.

75. On the 8th February, the joint Fourteenth Army/221 Group R.A.F. Headquarters opened at Monywa. This now included the Rear Headquarters, 221 Group, which had been left behind at Imphal when Army Headquarters moved forward, only a small operations staff then accompanying the Army Headquarters. 221 Group Headquarters, under Air Vice-Marshal S. F. Vincent, and Headquarters Fourteenth Army maintained a joint Headquarters for the remainder of the campaign.

76. It was now becoming operationally essential to bring up more formations. To do so involved administrative risk, but we could now look forward to some improvement in the transport aircraft situation after the 1st February and a further large improvement on the 1st March. By the end of January, therefore, 17 Indian Division was concentrated forward in the Gangaw Valley, together with 255 Indian Tank Brigade, as already mentioned. I also told General Slim that he could bring forward 5 Indian Division, which had been reorganized like 17 Indian Division, when he required it.

77. The distance between 19 Indian Division's bridgehead at Thabeikkyin, to the projected 4 Corps' crossing in the vicinity of Pakokku is some 160 miles. Between Thabeikkyin and the other 19 Indian Divisional bridgehead at Kyaukmyaung—about 24 miles—the river flows through jungle-clad hills and is comparatively narrow, being some 500 yards wide. From Kyaukmyaung downstream, the country opens out and the width of the river varies from 2,000 yards to 4,500 yards at its junction with the Chindwin (between Myingyan and Pakokku). The current in the dry season is about two knots in the wider stretches, but navigation is obstructed by islands and sandbanks. Generally speaking, the south bank dominates the northern approaches, but this does not apply to the loop, where the Sagaing Hills (which the Japanese were careful to hold) on the north bank dominate not only the river to the east and south, but all approaches to it from the north. I would sum up my impressions of this wide and treacherous river by saying that I cannot imagine a more formidable military water obstacle.

78. Our primary object in the north was to divert attention from the projected 4 Corps' crossing near Pakokku. To achieve this, the first crossings, as already stated, had been made by 19 Indian Division on the extreme left flank of Fourteenth Army. This, it was hoped, together with the deception measures we were employing, would lead the enemy to appreciate that the rest of 4 Corps would follow 19 Indian Division, and that our main effort from there would be directed on Mandalay. This illusion would be strengthened by the steady advance of 36 British Division from the north. The