

advances made exceeded all planned expectations. This can be attributed to the following main causes:—

(i) The magnitude of the Japanese defeat at Imphal, which was not realised until much later.

(ii) The virtual elimination of enemy air opposition resulting in complete predominance and liberty of action of our offensive and air transport forces.

(iii) The steady growth of air supply resources and improvements in their organisation.

(iv) The occupation of Akyab and Ramree, which had been decided upon to provide advanced air supply bases. This enabled us to reorient and shorten the supply lines in relation to the advance southward of Fourteenth Army.

14. By February, 1945, the possibilities of a more ambitious plan were becoming evident, and Fourteenth Army and 221 Group submitted a plan for vigorous exploitation of the favourable set of circumstances then obtaining. G.O.C. Fourteenth Army considered that if the enemy elected to stand and fight around Mandalay, there was every hope of destroying the Japanese Army in the open plains of Central Burma, thereby opening the route for a swift advance upon Rangoon by highly mobile columns. The plan aimed at encirclement of the enemy forces on the Mandalay Plain to be completed by air attack on such lines of communication as remained open to him. In conjunction with a direct thrust by 33 Corps towards Mandalay, 4 Corps were to carry out a wide encircling movement directed towards Meiktila which would cut the main line of communication southwards. Meiktila itself was to be secured by a small air transported force who would consolidate our position athwart this vital route.

15. This bold plan was highly successful, and as a result the Japanese Army in Burma suffered heavy casualties in a costly and bloody killing match to which the Air Forces contributed in large measure. Notwithstanding its success, the battle of extermination took longer than had been contemplated, and the time-table for the dash to Rangoon by 4 Corps was in jeopardy. The prospect of a race against a reduced time limit caused considerable anxiety in the mind of C.-in-C. Allied Land Forces, South East Asia (A.L.F.S.E.A.). In his opinion the overland advance by highly mobile forces might not have the necessary impetus to overcome opposition en route, together with the final opposition estimated from the defenders of Rangoon, reinforced by the remnants of field formations extricated from Central Burma. Upon his urgent recommendations, the capture of Rangoon before the monsoon was made more certain by the mounting of a modified "Dracula" by sea and air.

16. To carry out this operation, it would be necessary to utilise forces which were earmarked to seize concurrently with the capture of Rangoon a springboard on the Malay Peninsula. In the event, this modified "Dracula" proved to have been unnecessary, as the following pages will show. Nevertheless the capture of Rangoon entailed such a large expenditure of effort and resources that planning has had to be conducted since then on

(68741)

the premise that large-scale refitting, re-deployment and marshalling of forces is necessary before the next step is undertaken. The occupation of Rangoon therefore constitutes a milestone in the history of South East Asia, marking the end of a well-defined period.

* * * *

PART TWO.

THE OPERATIONAL BACKGROUND, JUNE, 1944—MAY, 1945.

17. When, on 22nd June, 1944, an overland junction was effected on the Imphal-Kohima road between the garrison of the Imphal plain and the relieving ground forces which had advanced from the north, a major crisis had been resolved, and our land forces, despite the monsoon, were able gradually to turn more and more both tactically and strategically to the offensive.

18. The Fourteenth Army, with its headquarters beside those of the Third Tactical Air Force at Comilla, controlled the Allied units on the southern two-thirds of the front. On its coastal section, 15 Corps held the port of Maungdaw and a monsoon line along the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road; its left flank was thinly covered by the Lushai Brigade which operated in guerilla fashion over the desolate hill country as far north as Haka and the valley of the Manipur River. In the Imphal Valley, although 4 Corps had linked up with 33 Corps advancing from Assam, the Japanese were still holding tenaciously to their positions among the hills east of Palel overlooking the plain; further to the north-east, however, the position was more favourable, and elements of 33 Corps were pressing forward towards Ukhrul.

19. Beyond the operational area of the Fourteenth Army, Special Force, which had been boldly launched into the heart of enemy held territory in March, was fighting both the weather and the enemy in the general area of the railway corridor east and south-east of Lake Indawgyi. It was controlled by the Northern Combat Area Command under General Stilwell, and had effected a junction with the Chinese and American forces now investing the Japanese garrison of Myitkyina, where the main airfield had passed into their hands. Further still to the north-east, a Chinese army based on Yunnan was fighting in the upper Salween valley.

20. The front remained static, during the period of the monsoon, only in the coastal area. On the Imphal sector, 33 Corps—which took over from 4 Corps when the latter was withdrawn from the line for four months—remained on the offensive. In the course of July the enemy was finally driven by combined air and ground bombardment from his tenaciously held positions, on the perimeter of the Imphal plain, and with the capture of Tamu in early August the Allied forces had re-established a foothold in the Kabaw Valley and were ready to push southwards towards Yazagyo and Kalemmyo and eastwards to the Chindwin.

21. On the right flank, a series of Japanese delaying positions on what was euphemistically called the Tiddim Road, was overcome during