

it enfiladed the other two crossings and was patrolled by the enemy. The crossings had to be made diagonally to avoid sandbanks, thus lengthening the time the boats were exposed to view and, unfortunately, the moon was nearly full. The first assault wave on to Ngazun Island (C Beach) was fired on, but about one company touched town and charged through the enemy positions. The supporting wave, however, failed to land and the enemy held their ground, pinning the first wave's boats to the beach by their fire and preventing their return. The assault on A Beach met heavy fire from artillery, mortars and infantry. Many boats were sunk and the assault had to be abandoned. The situation was serious and it looked as if the crossing might fail, but there remained B Beach. Here the 1st Battalion, The Queens' Own Cameron Highlanders, who had the longest crossing to make, also encountered heavy fire but they effected a gallant landing, storming up the steep 30-foot bank and establishing a bridgehead. Again, however, no boats got back.

89. What followed was an outstanding feat of control, staff work and discipline. It was, obviously, essential to reinforce with infantry the bridgehead on B Beach at once, but this entailed a complete change of plan. The possibility of partial failure had been foreseen and an alternative plan had been prepared, but the fact that it was rapidly and successfully executed in darkness—the moon had set—despite the inevitable confusion of the initial failures, and despite the shortage of equipment, many craft not having returned, reflects great credit on all concerned, from the Divisional Commander (Major-General C. G. G. Nicholson) downwards.

By first light on the 25th February, two battalions of 5 Brigade were established complete on the south bank and one battalion of 6 Brigade complete on Ngazun Island. By the 26th the whole of both 5 and 6 Brigades were over, together with a squadron of tanks, and on this date Ngazun Village was captured. On the 27th February, the bridgehead had been extended to a depth of five miles and 4 Brigade had begun to cross, after being relieved in the Ondaw area by 268 Indian Infantry Brigade. 268 Indian Infantry Brigade had taken over the Sagaing area to enable 2 British Division to concentrate on their crossing, and were responsible for the open flank between 19 Indian Division and 2 British Division. Our troops received strong air support throughout these operations: Ngazun was only captured after it had been set on fire by the Royal Air Force.

90. I would like to emphasise here the magnitude of Fourteenth Army's achievement in crossing this great river obstacle, in the face of a brave and determined enemy and with a minimum of modern equipment. It is worth considering that the Irrawaddy is four times as wide as the Rhine, while the Japanese soldier in well prepared positions is no less formidable than the German. It is the greatest tribute to the Commander, officers and men of Fourteenth Army that such a hazardous and exacting operation was crowned with success. By the end of February, four divisions and a tank brigade were firmly established on the left bank of the river.

91. Before going on to the next phase of operations and the Japanese reactions to our crossings, which are described in the next section, I will draw attention to the progress made in Northern Burma on the Northern Combat Area Command front since my last mention of it (paragraphs 43-47). Namhkam fell to 30 Chinese Division on the 15th January. 38 Chinese Division entered the village of Muse on the 22nd, linking up with the Chinese Expeditionary Force which had just captured Wanting, thus reopening a through route from Burma to China. The American "Mars" Brigade were operating in the area 30 miles north-west of Hsenwi, into which 56 Japanese Division from the Wanting area was withdrawing. The main body of 36 British Division (26 and 72 Brigades) was advancing south on Mongmit and, at the end of January, it had reached a point on the Shweli River 18 miles to the north of that place. One detached brigade (29 Brigade) of this Division had made considerable progress down the east bank of the Irrawaddy, capturing Twinng, 15 miles north of 19 Indian Division's bridgehead at Thabeikkyin on the 24th January. It then turned due east along the main road to Mongmit.

SECTION VI (paras. 92-101) THE SITUATION IN FEBRUARY

A.L.F.S.E.A. Operation Instruction of the 27th February, 1945: The change in scope of the Burma operations: The Japanese plans for a counter-offensive: Operations to enlarge our bridgeheads: The Northern Combat Area Command front.

92. Directly it became apparent that our crossings of the Irrawaddy had succeeded over a wide front, I issued, on the 27th February, an Operation Instruction to General Slim, General Sultan and General Christison in order to co-ordinate operations in the immediate future. It will be remembered that on the 26th January, the Chiefs of Staff had promised to increase our transport aircraft to meet our essential requirements by the 1st March. With this in mind, I instructed Fourteenth Army to destroy the Japanese forces in the Mandalay area and to capture Rangoon before the monsoon. Northern Combat Area Command were directed to seize the general area Kyaukse—Lashio and then to turn south-west and co-operate in the Mandalay area battle. After this they were to exploit out towards Loilem. 15 Indian Corps, whose tasks I had already a month before extended to include developing the air bases on Akyab and Ramree Islands for the supply of Fourteenth Army, and to operations as far south as Taungup, were now directed, in general, to contain the maximum number of enemy forces, particularly by operating up the An and Taungup—Prome routes. (These operations by 15 Indian Corps will be discussed in detail in a later part of this Despatch.) Since this Operation Instruction contains my brief appreciation of the situation at the time, I have attached a copy at Appendix A.

93. It will be seen at once that the outline of operations given above represents a great development from the situation in November, 1944. Then we were directing our efforts to enable us to launch a major expedition against